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"THE ORIGINAL BUFFALO BILL STORY."

BUFFALO BILL'S BEST SHOT.

BY NED BUNTLINE.



BUFFALO BILL SAW HER PERIL, RAISED HIS RIFLE, AND SENT THE BALL THROUGH THE UPRaised RIGHT ARM.

BUFFALO BILL'S BEST SHOT.

By NED BUNTLINE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHIEF'S OATH.

"Dave, life is worth a good deal to me, whether it is to you or not, for I want to live for them that I love."

Thus spoke Buffalo Bill, the famous American scout, to his bosom friend and long-time mate in many a wild hunt, Dave Estes, as they looked eastward from a peak in the great Wind-River Gap of the Rocky Mountains, west, full two days' ride from Fort Thompson, the nearest spot where the sight of white men could greet their eyes, for they were in the heart of the north-western hunting grounds of the Sioux nation.

The two scouts, well-mounted and well-armed, had come thus far alone into this dreaded range to satisfy themselves on two points—one, a rumor that placer gold was wondrously plentiful in the deep gulches and ravines of the Wind-River Mountains—the other, that for bear, elk, mountain sheep, and antelope, this was a hunter's Paradise.

And they had learned that the rumors had good foundation. They had prospected for, and found fine gold in the black sand, in small nuggets, and in quartz ledges. As to game, they could have fed a brigade, and not worried themselves in doing it. They only wondered that the Indians went so far down into the grassy plains for buffalo when other meat was so plenty in this upper range, where food and water were to be found on every side.

"What are you growlin' about, Bill?" said Dave, in reply. "The reds are all off on the plains, and we've got the hills all to ourselves. We've seen a heap of new ground on this scout, and I'd like to look a little farther. Let's stay out one day longer, and then I'll agree to head either for the Big Horn or North Platte, just which you like."

"You said the same thing two days ago, Dave," said Bill, "yet here we are a day's ride nearer to sunset now than we were then. 'You never tire on a scout.' Good reason why—you are at all the home you have, wherever you camp. But it isn't so with me. Bright eyes are growing dim with watching for me, far away, and there're heart-strings pulling me toward home, where my loved ones are."

"Just so. This getting married ruins a man for scouting and plains life. It takes the game out of him."

"Look here, Dave! step light, or you'll wake me up!" cried Bill, and the anger light flashed from his eyes. "I'm as game now as I ever was, and you know it, or you ought to. Who saved your hair when you were down, and the Sioux crowding for you like a pack of starved wolves?"

"You, Bill—you! and God bless you for it."

"And wasn't I married then—a husband and a father?"

"Yes, Bill, and I take back all that I said. But I was never in such a game country as this before, and there's just one range I'd like to look at to-day, and then I'm willing to go back. I'd rather you'd stay in camp than not to rest the horses and to pack our specimens, and then we'll move at day-dawn to-morrow."

"Agreed, mate; but never again say that getting married has made me less a man. I wasn't half the man I am

until I had something to love and to live for."

"I know it, Bill. You used to punish whisky and shuffle the cards in camp before that happened. But you've quit that, and I know you're the better for it."

"Every man is that keeps wide of such things, Dave. But talk isn't business. If you are bent on a scout to-day don't go far, and be in camp early. I'll take the horses down, and pack our specimens, and have supper ready when you come."

"All right!" said Dave, dismounting. "I'm going where horses can't travel, up that gulch we looked at yesterday."

The scout, a small, agile, wiry man, left the Apollo of the Plains, Buffalo Bill, to return, while he, shouldering his Spencer rifle, took a course along the ridge westward.

Bill called to the well-trained horse of his mate to follow and turned "Powder Face," his own favorite steed, to the east, in the direction of their camp, which had been pitched in a little valley, near a small lake at the foot of the hill where the two men parted.

He rode leisurely along, a Henry rifle slung at the rear of his saddle, but with his favorite needle-gun over his shoulder, ready for instant use.

Meat was plenty in camp, so he allowed the game in sight at a dozen points to feed on unmolested, while he descended the hill.

He was nearly down when a sight met his eye that made him draw his horses close in cover under a clump of dwarfish pines, where he could see without being seen.

He saw, coming through the valley from the east, three figures on horseback, riding at a terrific pace.

He quickly got his field-glass into focus, and by its aid discovered the character of the riders.

Two rode side by side, several yards in advance of the third.

Of these the first was an armed Indian warrior, and he led the second horse, which bore an Indian girl, who, from her position, seemed to be bound to the horse which the warrior led.

The third rider, so far in the rear, was also an armed Indian warrior, and he was lashing his horse furiously, as the first also lashed his and that which he led.

"A race for life, it looks like!" said Buffalo Bill. "But I see no sign of any pursuer. If that was a white woman I'd take a hand in mighty sudden. As it is, squaws are not in my line, and if it is a runaway, or an abduction, why, it's their business, not mine."

So he rode on down the hill, knowing that the two warriors had too much on their own hands to look to to have time to notice him.

The first warrior and the squaw dashed on through the gap, while, just as Bill reached the level, the horse of the other warrior fell, throwing its rider heavily against a huge boulder, and leaving him senseless on the ground.

Bill rode up, thinking, from the way he lay, that the Indian had fractured his skull or broken his neck; but he found him conscious as he halted by his side, though he was unable to rise.

"Pale-face, I know you. You are Long-Rifle, the great killer of buffalo," said the Indian as Bill reined in his horse.

"Yes, the reds all know me," said Bill, quietly. "What is the matter with you?"

"Heap bad is the matter. Me got an arm and leg broke—my horse most dead, and Yellow Bear, the Black-Foot chief, has gone beyond my reach with Dove-Eye, my daughter, the Red Rose of my tribe."

"Dove-Eye! Then you are Spotted-Tail, the great war

chief of the Big-Horn Sioux?"

"Yes; I am Spotted-Tail. Kill me if you like; I have taken scalps enough to line my lodge."

"Killing cripples isn't in my line," said Bill, in a haughty tone. "But I'll make a bargain with you, Spotted-Tail. If you'll agree to keep peace with all pale-faces who come here to hunt and look for gold, I'll get that gal back and bring you the scalp of Yellow Bear. Will you agree to this?"

"Long-Rifle, I will."

"Swear it by the Great Spirit."

"As He hears me who rides on the wings of the storm, and sends the lightning-knives to scathe the great trees of the forest, I swear to be a friend to the pale-faces if Dove-Eye is saved from the claws of Yellow Bear, the Black-Foot."

"Enough! Crawl to my camp, where you'll find meat and drink," said Bill; and loosing Dave's horse, he turned Powder Face on the trail of Yellow Bear, and uttered a cry which put the noble horse to its utmost speed in a second.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCOUT'S BEST SHOT.

A handsome Indian woman is a rarity; but the daughter of Spotted-Tail, Dove-Eye, womanly in graceful development, though but fifteen summers' bloom was on her cheek, was an exception. On all the plains, through the Black Hills, and in the great mountains, she was known as the Red Rose of the Sioux nation, as the most beautiful Indian girl alive.

Already warriors of her own tribe had fought in jealous rivalry to gain but a friendly glance from her eyes; already her father had been asked for her hand by some of the bravest and richest chiefs of his and other tribes; but his answer was:

"Dove-Eye is the heart of Spotted-Tail—he cannot part with his child!"

She had known no love but that felt for her father and mother, so the chiefs and warriors found no encouragement from her.

But Yellow Bear, a dreaded chief of the Black-Foot, a tribe at war with all around them, had not asked her parents or herself for her hand; with a great hunter's stealth he had crept into the village of her father when almost all the tribe were away on a buffalo hunt, and that father was detained by sickness in his lodge, and with a daring peculiar to him and his tribe, had seized and borne her away, bound on a captured horse, the best he could find in the corral.

Spotted-Tail, sick though he was, had followed swiftly on the trail, and had come almost within rifle-shot of Yellow Bear when his horse fell.

The Black-Foot chief saw the mishap, and he rode on more leisurely, to save his horses for the long journey yet before him, for he did not see Buffalo Bill riding down toward his fallen pursuer.

"Is Dove-Eye tired?" he asked, hoping now to get an answer from her lips, for she had not spoken one word to him since her capture.

The great black eyes of the girl flashed a look of unutterable hate into his face, but she did not speak.

"Dove-Eye will find her tongue by and by, or Yellow Bear will help her!" said the chief, savagely. "The horse of Spotted-Tail has given out, and Dove-Eye need not hope

to see her father again!"

The girl looked back, and a cry of joy broke from her lips. She saw that a pursuer was nearer than before, and she thought none but her father was on the trail.

Yellow Bear turned his eyes back, and he saw that it was not Spotted-Tail, but a well-armed and well-mounted pale-face, who was coming swiftly on his track.

Quickly he lashed his horse and that which bore Dove-Eye into furious speed once more—dangerous speed, indeed, for the rough route he was passing over, grew rougher and more narrow as they ascended the pass; but there was a danger behind which the Black-Foot could comprehend, for he had battled with pale-faces before, and on, on madly, he went.

Nearer and nearer the pursuer came, and a low, scornful laugh broke from the lips of Dove-Eye for she deemed her rescue sure now.

Yellow Bear heard it, and his anger flamed up, and he resolved that she should first die, and then he would face his pursuer.

Checking his horse suddenly, he clutched her round arm, and raising her form so as to bring her heart full before him, he raised his arm to drive the knife which he held, home in her unprotected bosom.

As he thus raised his arm a terrible yell broke from his lips—a cry of defiance and hate.

Dove-Eye, fearless and full of scorn, looked him defiantly in the face, expecting instant death; but suddenly his arm fell and the knife dropped to the earth, for Buffalo Bill, fully one hundred yards away, saw her peril, raised his rifle quick as thought, fired, and sent the ball through the upraised right arm.

Yellow Bear, helpless to use knife or rifle now, uttered a scream of baffled rage and pain, then leaping from his horse he plunged off into a thicket, where no horseman could follow him, just as Buffalo Bill dashed up on his horse to finish the work begun by what he has since termed the best shot he ever made.*

"Dove-Eye is safe!" he said, as he reined his horse back to its haunches and cut the thongs which bound her. "Her father is at my camp, waiting for her."

"Dove-Eye has not words to thank the brave pale-face with," said she. "Her life has been saved by him, and she will be his slave forever."

"Buffalo Bill doesn't believe in slave-women, and he needs no thanks," said the heroic scout. "But look to his horse. He promised to take your father back a scalp, and he must get it."

Bill threw the reins of his horse into the hands of the liberated maiden, and sprang into the thicket after Yellow Bear.

It may be wondered by the reader why he did not send a bullet through the heart of the Black-Foot instead of through his arm, when his rifle could have done either.

Simply because he knew that a shot through the heart would never check that descending arm, and that the arm must be struck or its blow would be death to her. And he had pierced it, though his horse was at full speed, and he fully one hundred yards away.

Dove-Eye saw the noble form of her preserver disappear in the chaparral, and her eyes gleamed with a new light.

"He is brave as the bravest, and beautiful as a lone pine upon a hill-top!" she said. "Dove-Eye will be his slave,

* Buffalo Bill is no common marksman, even for a hunter. The writer has seen him drop the prairie grouse, with a single ball, on the wing, with both rifle and pistol.

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or she will cook meat for no man."

She waited minutes, and they seemed long, for him to return; and then almost an hour passed before Buffalo Bill came back.

When he did return he looked flushed and angry.

"The skulking cuss has got away," he said. "He can outrun a crippled wild-turkey, and hide better than a chick-pheasant. I've lost him and his trail, but I'll have his scalp yet, and keep my word with Spotted-Tail."

Dove-Eye did not speak. She never dared to speak to her father when his brow wore the anger-cloud, and she thought she must be silent when the brave pale-face was angry.

When he said, as he took his bridle-rein from her hand, "We will go to the camp where your father is," she bowed her head and turned her horse, while Bill secured the other horse, so that the Black-Foot chief could not find him and remount.

Bill now led the way back down the pass, closely followed by Dove-Eye, whose eyes watched with free admiration every movement of his manly, graceful form.

"There is no warrior like him in all the tribes!" she murmured, as she rode on. "Dove-Eye must win his love, or die."

CHAPTER III.

THE LITTLE SCOUT IN LOVE.

When Buffalo Bill, leading the captured horse deserted by Yellow Bear, and followed by Dove Eye, rode back to where he had left Spotted-Tail, he found the chief seated on the ground, near his dead horse, for the animal had literally run on until its life gave out with its last efforts.

A gleam of satisfaction brightened the eyes of Spotted-Tail as he saw his daughter free and unharmed; then his eyes looked to the belt of Buffalo Bill for the scalp which the latter had promised.

The scout knew why he looked, and said, not without embarrassment:

"Yellow Bear crippled by a ball from my rifle, has got away. I could not take his scalp this time. But I have given my word; I never break it. You shall yet have that scalp. He was in my power, but had I shot to kill, his arm would have sent the knife he held over the heart of Dove-Eye home before he died. The arm can neither use knife or rifle now, but his legs carried him off. There is his horse in place of your own."

"Long-Rifle is a great brave. He has brought Dove-Eye back to her father; and Spotted-Tail for this will keep peace between his band and the pale-faces. When his arm and leg get so he can use them, he will hunt for the scalp of Yellow Bear himself. But now, he must be taken back to his own people, for he is no good with these broken bones. It is but a day's ride to the lands of the Black-Foot, and Yellow Bear will get to his people, and, it may be, come back to try and steal Dove-Eye again, and take the scalp of her father."

"A day's ride only? Then that smoke means something!" said Buffalo Bill, as a white pillar, made by the burning of moss, rose toward the sky away in the north-west.

"Yes. Yellow Bear is speaking to the eyes of his people. Make my broken leg and arm straight between pieces of wood, and put me on the horse soon, for if we stay here we will have the Black-Foot like hungry wolves upon us. If they come before I am ready, take Dove-Eye and go. She must never be a slave to Yellow Bear."

"She never will be!" said the beautiful girl, looking her father in the eye, and she knelt down by his side to aid Buffalo Bill to set the broken bones and secure them in the splints which the hunter clipped from a cedar-tree near by.

With such skill as men brought up on the plains almost invariably possess, the hunter proceeded to place the broken limbs in proper position, and then with the long, silken scarf which he wore, cut into strips, he bound the cedar splints securely in place, the chief never wincing under the painful operation, though his agony must have been intense.

Dove-Eye calmly aided in the work, less nervous, indeed, than the chief operator.

Indian nature may be human nature, but one who has seen how they can endure pain rather doubts it.

As soon as the surgical job was over, Buffalo Bill assisted the Sioux chief up on the horse which Yellow Bear had left, and then the three rode down to the camp which the two scouts had occupied on the border of the little lake.

"Why does Long-Rifle stop here?" asked Spotted-Tail, as Buffalo Bill came to a halt at the camp.

"Because I have a mate up in the hills who will not come in till night," said Bill. "I can't desert him."

"Long-Rifle is right to be true to his friend; but the Black-Foot will be on our trail before another sun is up."

"Then some of 'em will have a free pass to the Happy Hunting-Ground above," said Buffalo Bill, in his quiet way, while a smile played like sunlight over his fine face.

"Let my brother make three smokes, a rifle shot apart, white, like that," said Spotted-Tail. "If any hunters or warriors of my tribe see them, they will not let their horses rest until they are with their chief. Does Long-Rifle know how to make the white smoke?"

And the chief pointed to the pillar of smoke in the north-west.

"Buffalo Bill has been on the plains all his life. The arts of the red man are as plain to him as the stars in the sky," replied the scout. "I will make the smokes, while Dove-Eye cooks meat for her father. There is plenty there."

The hunter pointed to birds, venison, and fish, all hanging to branches near his camp-fire; and then he tore a large lot of moss from the trees near at hand, mounted his horse, and rode away to make the smoke-signal.

Soon Spotted-Tail saw three white pillars going up in the still air, and he hoped they might be seen by some of his braves, even though they were far away; for he was in no condition for travel, and certainly in none for fighting.

Dove-Eye, while the scout was gone on his errand, with the ready tact of a forest-born maiden, stirred up the embers of the camp-fire, and placed meat, fowls, and fish before the coals, on the forked sticks which had been used for that purpose before; then she peeled bark for platters, for she had seen pale-faces use plates, and she wished to do all she could to please the brave man who had rescued her from the power of Yellow Bear.

She had just got her arrangements made when Buffalo Bill returned. He smiled when he saw not only how nicely she had cooked the meal, but how neatly it was laid upon bark plates, and he said:

"Dove-Eye knows how to keep a lodge if she can't run a hotel."

The girl did not understand his meaning, though she knew he spoke in compliment. His pleased looks told that.

"Will Long-Rifle and my father eat?" she asked. "The meat is ready."

"We will, Dove-Eye, and so must you, for I reckon you need it as much as we."

"Dove-Eye will wait till her father and his friend are done; then she will eat."

Buffalo Bill knew what Indian customs were too well to try to persuade her against them, and he joined Spotted-Tail in a hearty meal, for his exercise had increased his appetite.

When her father and the hunter had finished, then Dove-Eye showed that the late perils she had passed through had not lessened her hunger, for she ate heartily.

Her meal was finished, and, with singular providence for an Indian, she laid away what had not been used, though plenty of game yet hung from the branches near at hand.

Suddenly the sound of footsteps aroused the attention of Buffalo Bill, who had been looking dreamily into the fire, on which Dove-Eye had just thrown her dinner plates, for there was no use to wash them when clean bark could be got with less trouble.

The eyes of the scout rested on Dave Estes, who had come suddenly into camp through the fringe of bushes to the west, and now stood transfixed with wonder, or some other feeling, gazing intently at Dove-Eye, who in turn glanced at him, seeming to measure him from head to foot.

"Glad you're back, Dave, for we'll find these hot quarters before long, if we stay!" said Buffalo Bill.

"Where's that angel dropped down from?" asked Dave, still gazing at Dove-Eye, as if he had never looked at a pretty Indian girl before.

Perhaps he never had. One thing was sure; he had never seen one half so handsome as she was, if he had seen ten thousand.

Buffalo Bill laughed as he answered:

"The girl is Dove-Eye, the daughter of the great Sioux war-chief, Spotted-Tail, who lies there with a broken leg and arm. We've got to see him and her back safe to their village."

"I'm in for that. But how did she come here? Oh, what a beauty she is! Does she understand English?"

"As well as you, as you can see by the smile on her face. She was stolen away from her father by Yellow Bear, a Black-Foot chief, and her father broke down here in the chase. I made a bargain with him to keep peace with us white folks, and then took the trail, got within shot of the Black-Foot and winged him. By that I got her back safe, and here she is."

"Bill, you're a mean cuss! Why didn't you let me save the gal?" cried Dave, red with excitement.

"Why weren't you on hand so as to take my chance? You were bent on prospecting, you know, and that took you out of the way."

"Cuss the luck! I'd rather do her a favor than the first born lady of civilization. She is prettier than any picture I ever saw!"

"Dave, you're in love."

"I know it, Bill, and if she doesn't love me, it sha'n't be my fault."

These latter expressions were uttered in a tone too low for Dove-Eye to hear them, for she had turned away from the too ardent gaze of the younger scout, and was now busy in placing her father in a more comfortable position.

Spotted-Tail now spoke, addressing Buffalo Bill:

"Since the friend of Long-Rifle has come back, would it

not be better that we travel as far as we can before the sun goes out of sight? The Black-Foot may be near to answer the signal of Yellow Bear, and be quick on our trail."

"Yes," said Buffalo Bill. "As soon as my mate gets a bite to eat we will start."

"Meat here, all ready," said Dove-Eye, producing the store she had laid away.

"I'll eat as I ride," said Dave. "Saddle up, and start as soon as you like. We can make twenty miles yet afore dark if we put our horses to their best."

"Little Brave has a good heart. Me like him. He is a brother to Long-Rifle?" said Dove-Eye, pleased at the readiness to go which Dave Estes exhibited.

"Not a brother, but a mighty good partner," said Buffalo Bill. "He isn't much on size, but he is keener than a whip-snake in a fight, and worse than a wolf on a hunt?"

Dave heard the words of the girl, and he sprang to get the horse ready, for he had an idea he would win her love, even if he had no hand in her rescue.

"Does she know you're married, Bill?" asked Dave, in a low tone, looking back at the girl as she caught her own horse.

"Not that I know of. But you needn't fear for me, Dave; there isn't the woman living, white or red, that can draw me from home-love. But I think we'll have enough to think of to save our own scalps before we are out of this muddle, to bother about love or anything else but business. Help me to get Spotted-Tail on his horse, and to fix him as easy as we can, and then we'll be off."

The Sioux chief was in a bad fix to ride, but he knew that life depended on his getting out of that vicinity, and he bore his pain without a murmur when the two scouts lifted him into the saddle, and secured him so he would not fall if pain or weakness should overcome him.

Dove Eye, with an independence rather painful to Dave Estes, the Little Brave, as she condescendingly termed him, arranged her own saddle, and was mounted before he could offer his assistance.

With her usual forethought she cut a quarter of venison loose from the branch on which it hung, so that when they next halted there would be no necessity to kill meat before they could cook a meal.

"What a queen-wife, she'd make for a hunter and trapper?" said Dave, as he took note of her action, and saw her hang the meat to the back part of the saddle. "Bill, I'm gone in. I never thought a red could take me; but I'm her prisoner for life, if she'll have me!"

Buffalo Bill smiled at this nearest declaration from Dave, for the young scout had hitherto seemed rather averse to the female sex both in talk and action.

"Which course shall we take?" asked Bill, speaking to Spotted-Tail, when they were ready to start.

"Go straight for sunrise," said the chief. "If we get to the Big Horn before the Black-Foot are on our trail, we will get soon where they may come and lose their scalps. The Wind River runs that way."

Buffalo Bill took the lead; Spotted-Tail rode next; Dove-Eye followed him; and Dave Estes brought up the rear, at his own wish for there he could feast his eyes on the lovely form that rode before him.

It was late in the day when they started, but the horses, were rested, and moved on at that pace so natural to the prairie-horse—an easy lope, which yet carries them over the ground at a rapid rate.

The route lay down the valley of the Wind River, and for the most part was smooth and easy, over a country

which, seen when one has leisure to study it, has no superior in all the wild far West.

Thus they kept on until night was closing in, when Bill came to a sudden halt. He saw, as they rounded a point of thick forest near the river-bank, a camp, close ahead—whether of red or white men, he could not tell.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE FIGURES ON A SHIELD.

A hundred lodges, at least, ranged on either side of a crystal brook, where it ran slowly through a little valley after it had dashed for leagues through dark chasms and down from lofty cliffs, told of the power of Yellow Bear; for this was his own village, and the occupants of these lodges were but a small part of his war-like tribe.

Prominent among the lodges was the large one in which he dwelt when in the village, and before it, on a tall lance, floated the pennon of yellow cloth, with a bear rudely drawn on it, which told all strangers who knew him only by his fame, that they were in the village of Yellow Bear.

There were many warriors idling about in groups, while women were busy about the camp-fires, cooking, for it was near time for the noontide meal.

A large drove of horses fed in the valley, watched by three or four mounted warriors and a large party of half-grown boys.

Suddenly a woman, tall in stature, in a head-dress of feathers which made her look yet more lofty, with a robe of rich scarlet cloth about her form, came out from the large lodge of the chief.

She was not a white woman, yet her complexion was very light for an Indian. She most likely belonged to the half-breed blood so common among the Indians of the far North-West since the great fur companies have induced the daring voyageurs and trappers to lead a savage life for their profit and gain.

Her look was haughty and commanding, and she was not devoid of beauty, though the freshness of youth had left her.

Close behind her came two other women—one, an old, haggard creature, with one eye gone, while the other shone like a ball of fire under her brow. Her coarse white hair hung loose over her bare, shrunken neck and bony shoulders.

The other, strangest of all, was very young and very beautiful—a white girl, with rich, curling hair, of almost golden hue, blue eyes, and regular features, dressed in the Indian style, a short skirt of cloth, fringed with fur, leggings of fawn skin, and moccasins worked curiously with stained porcupine quills; a scarlet blanket over her shoulders, which did not entirely conceal her round, white arms or her graceful neck. Her head was bare, only she wore twisted in her rich tresses the single eagle feather which told her to be a chief's daughter and unmarried.

The contrast between her and the one-eyed hag at her side was immense; one looked to be seventy or eighty years old, while the other was not over sixteen, or at most eighteen; one looked as if she were a representative of the dominion of witches, the other as if she were an houri lingering about the gates of Paradise.

The tall and queenly looking woman stood for a moment outside of the lodge of Yellow Bear, and glanced up and down the valley; then she turned to the young girl, and said:

"Wanda, the Queen of the Black-Feet, will now listen to the dream of Cindah the Sunflower. Then she will ride up to the hill-top to look for Yellow Bear, her chief, and the father of Cindah the Sunflower."

"He is not my father! The Spirit of Dreams came to me and told me that the skin of my father was white like my own; that I have a mother as beautiful as the flowers I love to pluck for my garlands, and as good as she is beautiful."

"The Spirit of Dreams has been speaking lies to Cindah the Sunflower! No father but Yellow Bear can claim a smile from her, nor shall any but Wanda call her daughter!"

The one-eyed hag muttered something, but neither Wanda nor the girl understood what she said.

The eyes, blue as they were, of the young girl flashed out a haughty look at the queenly looking woman who stood before her, and she said:

"The Great Spirit will not lie! The Dream Spirit is his angel, and he, too, must speak true words with a single tongue. I have heard Yellow Bear say that this is so."

"Yellow Bear has said foolish things, and he has dreamed bad dreams. He dreamed that he must go to the land of his enemies, to the hunting-grounds of the Sioux to steal him a new wife. It was a bad dream. I told him he would come back as he went, empty-handed. And he will. Were he to bring a strange wife here, the knife of Wanda should drink her blood! But this is not your dream. My ears are open to hear it."

The young girl was about to speak, when a warrior, who had been looking away to the south-east, uttered a shrill shout.

In an instant every one in the village was attracted first toward him and then to a pillar of white smoke which rose suddenly above the hill-tops in that direction.

In silence they looked a few seconds, and then it went out of sight. They still looked and waited in silence, Wanda as quiet as the rest.

Then again the white column rose to view. Then it faded away, and a third time it came in sight.

Wanda put her hand to her belt and took out a whistle made from the tip of an antelope's horn. This she blew with a loud, shrill call, which could be heard far up and down the valley.

In a second the warriors were seen rushing to their lodges to arm themselves, while the guards in charge of the horses drove the herd in where the animals could be accoutered for use.

Wanda herself disappeared inside of the large lodge for a few minutes. When she came out she was clad in a short skirt, a hunting-jacket of fur, and with her limbs incased in leggings, while she carried a gun in her hand, and wore a knife and pistols in her belt.

As she came forth she cried out to the assembling warriors:

"Yellow Bear has called for help. Wanda will go at the head of the bravest who answer his signal!"

A yell of applause broke from every lip as Wanda spoke, and a young brave led a large, cream-colored horse, with mane and tail of jet-black hue, up for her use. It was instantly bridled and saddled.

Before she mounted, Wanda turned to the one-eyed hag, and said:

"Kincatah, keep thy one eye wide open. Cindah dreams too much. She is under thy care while we are gone. For-

get it not!"

The old hag answered, with a hoarse, croaking voice:

"The Sunflower will not go out of sight of Kincatah!"

Wanda said no more, but springing with an agile bound astride the noble horse, which two braves could hardly hold, she waved her rifle in the air, and, with a shrill cry, dashed off at a swift gallop to the south.

The warriors, in a single column, followed at the same pace.

Cindah gazed after them a moment, and then re-entered the lodge.

The one-eyed hag hobbled in after her, muttering to herself as she went.

An instant later, a young brave, who until now had not come into the foreground, came up in front of the lodge, and looking cautiously around as if to see whether any one was near to notice his actions, advanced to the shield which hung on the center-pole and made three marks upon it with a piece of charred coal.

One was the sign of a narrow-head; the next a plain square; the third a rude resemblance of a tree.

Then he uttered a cry like that made by a hawk when, circling in the air, it looks for prey, and instantly hurried away.

He had not been gone a half-minute when Cindah came hurriedly from the lodge, glanced around, then looked at the shield.

"A letter for me, from the strange friend, left in the hollow tree!" she murmured, as she looked at the marks on one shield, and then she brushed them away with the palm of her hand.

The next second the one-eyed hag hobbled out, and glared suspiciously at the girl through her one blazing orb.

"What did the Sunflower come out of the lodge so quickly for?" asked Kincatah.

"Because she wanted to. Cindah is no slave to be told to come and go by another. She is as free as the wind that whispers among the trees. She will come and go as her will tells her to do."

"Not while Wanda and Yellow Bear are away will the Sunflower go out of sight of Kincatah the One-Eyed!" said the hag.

"We will see!" cried Cindah, angrily.

She blew a small whistle made from the slender bone of an antelope's fore leg.

The call brought the young warrior who had made the marks on the shield into her presence.

"Red Plume will saddle his horse and mine. Cindah wants to ride in the fresh air of the hill-sides," said the girl.

"Saddle a horse, too, for Kincatah!" cried the old hag.

"Let it be one-eyed and lame like herself," said Cindah, scornfully.

"Fool! Rain shall fall in a flood from your eyes for this!" screamed the hag.

Cindah laughed to see her open eye blaze in furious light, while the young warrior hurried off to get the horses.

CHAPTER V.

DAVE ESTES' SUSPICIONS.

When Buffalo Bill made the sudden halt, seeing a camp-fire so close ahead as he turned the point of timber, he also cocked his gun for instant use, for he was in rifle-shot of

the strangers, who ever they were.

Dave Estes rode to the front, with his Spencer rifle ready, while Dove-Eye, as fearless as any of the party, now carrying her father's rifle, rode up in a line with them.

"White men, and a rough-looking set!" said Bill, a moment later, as about a dozen men sprang up from about the fire, with guns in their hands. "We may as well ride up and take things coolly, for we're in too close range to back out now."

So he rode boldly on, his gun ready for use, while those in front, calling to a couple of men who were with their horses in a grassy nook, to look out for the stock, stepped up in front of their camp and waited for the scout and his party to come up, eying them suspiciously as they came.

Buffalo Bill had seen enough of life in the West to read their characters at a glance.

They were not regular hunters and trappers, though well armed, and dressed as rudely as men of that character would be.

In settlements where it would pay they would have made gambling and drinking their chief visible occupation, adding burglary or highway robbery to it when they could do so with any degree of safety or success.

Road agents they would have been termed in California or Nevada.

They were, in number, fourteen, and mostly men of middle age, bearded and long haired, coarse, and repulsive in looks and manners.

One only had a different look, and Bill saw that he was the leader. His dress was superior to the rest—a kind of velvet hunting-coat reached below his hips, while buckskin breeches, tight-fitting to a large, well-shaped leg, met high cavalry boots, on which he wore a pair of silver Mexican spurs.

His pistols were ornamented with silver mountings, and his large hunting-knife was nearly as long as an artillery sword.

He was young, too—not over twenty-one or two—with long black hair hanging in curls about his shoulders, and with a smooth, almost womanly face.

Yet his dark, sharp eye, his firm, close-set lips, and his air of command, told, even before he spoke, that he was a person of firm and resolute nature, and that he held the rest under control.

"Which way, strangers?" he asked, in a bold, authoritative tone.

"We are bound east, to the village of this wounded chief," said Buffalo Bill, pointing to Spotted-Tail. "He holds his headquarters on the Big-Horn, if you know where that is."

"I only know that it is down on a map I travel by," said the other. "I'm new in these parts, though I've been over the plains twice."

"I should think you were new, or you'd be careful how you camped in the heart of a hostile Indian country."

"Why, you're two whites, and are friendly with the Indians, or is that chap, and the girl with him, held captive by you?"

"No; they are friends, because I did the chief favors. Scalps would be in demand if you or I were met by any of his tribe, or by the Black-Foots."

"They'd get more lead than hair from my party," said the other. "As you can't go any farther before night sets in, camp, and we'll treat you as well as we can."

Buffalo Bill did not like the looks of the party, but it was best to keep on friendly terms with them if he could. So he said:

"We will camp near by you; but we've meat along, and need no help. We're all used to dropping down where night catches us."

"All right, stranger!" said the young man. Then, turning to his own men, who crowded rather close, he said: "Fall back to camp, men!"

The men obeyed, as under good discipline; but Dave Estes noticed that they almost to a man gazed with looks of too evident admiration to suit him on the face and form of the beautiful Indian girl.

Buffalo Bill rode on and about a couple of hundred yards above the other camp, halted on the banks of the stream.

"We'll pitch camp here and let our horses rest and feed!" he said, addressing Spotted-Tail. "But we'll leave before daylight."

"Good! Long-Rifle knows what is best. The life of Spotted Tail is in his hands. He trusts Long-Rifle and the Little Brave."

"We'll take as good care of you as we know how," said Bill, dismounting.

He now unfastened the chief from his horse, and aided by Dove-Eye, who spread out blankets carefully, laid him down under the branches of a willow-tree, and then while Dave Estes picketed the horses to grass close at hand, the hunter gathered dry fuel and kindled a bright, cheerful fire.

Spotted Tail spoke a word of warning about this, but Buffalo Bill pointed to the other fire, and to the full moon just up, and said:

"It will add to our comfort and not increase our danger."

Dove-Eye at once began to cook supper, and Buffalo Bill took from his own stores some coffee and hung a small camp-kettle full of water over the fire to boil.

While these preparations were going on the leader of the other party came over, and seemed disposed to enter into conversation.

"Got all you want here?" he asked.

"Yes—thank you—all we need?" said Buffalo Bill, quietly.

"You're an old hand in camp-life," continued the stranger.

"Yes, born and brought up to it!" answered the other.

"I'm more at home here than I'd be in a palace!"

"Yet you use good language—have better manners than the trappers I've met before?"

"Good manners, like the measles, are easy caught. I've been a great deal with educated men, army officers, and others," said Buffalo Bill, dryly. "It is very easy to be a gentleman when one knows how!"

"What might your name be?" asked the stranger.

"It might be John Smith, sir, but it isn't!" said Buffalo Bill, dryly. "I've no reason to conceal it. My father's name was Cody—so was that of my mother, his wife. I've earned the name of Buffalo Bill!"

The stranger started.

"You were born in Kansas—your father was killed there!" he said.

"Yes—by border ruffians! I've wiped out the debt!" said Buffalo Bill, grimly.

"Yes. I've heard of you before," said the stranger.

"But I expected to see a different man—a giant in stature and a demon in looks."

Buffalo Bill smiled, and he drew up his tall figure proudly, as he answered:

"I'm only harsh when it is forced on me. Now, stranger, since you know my name, and a fair exchange is no robbery, what might yours be?"

"It might be Quantrell—but it isn't!" said the young man, laughing.

"It is well for you that it isn't!" said Buffalo Bill, in a sharp, decisive, tone. "I don't want the reward that is up for Quantrell, but I do want one shot at him for the evil he has done that I know. But as your name isn't Quantrell, what is it?"

"Boyd—without any preface!" said the other. "I left that when I left civilized life and took command of that camp gang over there. You can call me Captain Boyd for the little time we are likely to be together."

"All right, Captain Boyd. I shall not trouble you with questions. I generally mind my own business and give to others the same privilege. But I may as well tell you that an early start on whatever route you mean to take and a care to hide your trail will most likely keep you out of a nasty Indian fight. We expect a band of Black-Foot after us, and should they strike your trail, they'd strike hard for your hair as well as your horses and weapons."

"Thank you for the warning. Why do you expect they will follow you?"

"Because I rescued this girl, the daughter of Spotted-Tail, that wounded chief, from Yellow Bear, a leading Black-Foot chief, this morning. I wounded him, but he got away. As soon as he can rally warriors for support he'll come. I know Indian nature well enough to be sure of that."

"She is good-looking for a squaw," said the young captain, carelessly. "But I'm not fond of women, so I seldom cast a second glance at them. They're at the bottom of two-thirds of the troubles that men get into, and I steer clear of their blandishments."

"That's sensible," muttered Dave Estes, who now came in and joined the group; "I used to do it."

Dove-Eye came from the fire where her meat had been cooking nicely, and told Long-Rifle, as she invariably called Buffalo Bill, that supper was ready.

"Join us, Captain Boyd," said Buffalo Bill, in a courteous tone.

"Thank you—no; I have supped. I came over to ask you about the country ahead, and the best route for me to take. We have come from the mines in Utah, and want to reach the Texas borders. Take your supper, and I'll confer with you afterward, if you have no objection."

"None, Captain Boyd; though I don't know so much about Texas as I do of the North-west. Come around after supper and I'll tell you what I can."

"What is he?" asked Dave Estes, when the young leader went back to his men.

"Your eyes can tell you as well as mine can. He doesn't say, and maybe it is just as well he shouldn't. I reckon he found Utah too hot for his gang, and that is why he is making for the Texas border."

By this time Dove-Eye had her supper served on fresh bark plates, and Buffalo Bill took off his hot coffee to add to her fare. But neither Spotted-Tail nor Dove-Eye would drink it. A calabash of cold water from the stream was the drink they preferred, and Dave Estes and Buffalo Bill had the coffee to themselves.

After supper Buffalo Bill was joined by Captain Boyd, who came with the map he had been traveling by, and for an hour or more the two talked about the country and the

routes. Then Boyd went to his camp, and the scout lay down to sleep till the midwatch came on, for he and Dave had agreed to take turns and stand guard all night.

The camp-fires had burned down low and all was quiet when Dave Estes woke Buffalo Bill to take his turn as sentinel.

"Do they keep any watch over there?" asked Buffalo Bill, glancing toward the other camp.

"None that I can see. Nothing has moved but the stock in the grass since I've been on watch."

"Such careless cusses deserve to lose hair," said the scout, who had all his life been used to the necessity of more vigilance at night than in the day time.

"We shall make an early start," he added. "You'll not have over two hours' sleep, Dave, so drop on your blanket at once."

Dave rolled his blanket around his form, and lay down near the embers of the camp-fire, while Bill went out to change the picket pins of his horses to a fresh grazing ground, so that they would have a good feed before daylight.

On approaching Powder Face he found that animal with his fore-feet planted close together—his head low bent till the nose was close to the ground, and his ear pointed toward the west, with a tremulous quiver visible in both.

Buffalo Bill had seen the animal in this position three times before, and he had each time learned a lesson. Twice he had been attacked by Indians before the dawn, and a third time a column of mounted troops, making a night march, passed his camp before daylight.

"So! there's danger in the wind, old boy!" said he to the horse, as he approached him.

The animal, with almost human intelligence, raised its head, and glaring off in the moonlight to the west, seemed to look for an approaching party. Then it snuffed in the air as if it really smelled an enemy.

Buffalo Bill did not pass these signs by unheeded. He had too much faith in the well known intelligence of Powder Face for that.

He at once took up the picket pins of all the horses and led them in to camp. Dave Estes was not yet asleep, and he sprang to his feet when the horses were led in.

"Saddle up, Dave—saddle up. I think there's danger close at hand. An hour's earlier start will do no hurt at any rate!" said Buffalo Bill, in a low tone.

Spotted-Tail and Dove-Eye were awake in a second more, and Buffalo Bill, without speaking his own convictions that an enemy was near, said he had made up his mind to an early start.

In less than five minutes the four were mounted and ready to move.

"Dave, lead the way and keep in the shadow of the timber," cried Buffalo Bill, when they were ready to start. "I will overtake you in three or four minutes."

"Why does Long-Rifle stay behind?" asked Spotted-Tail.

"To put out our fire and make a false trail," said the scout.

But he had another and nobler purpose. While feeling that danger was creeping up, he could not go off and leave the other party, strangers though they were, to sleep on, perhaps with death creeping up to surprise them.

So, the moment Dave rode on, followed by Spotted-Tail and Dove-Eye, the brave scout turned the head of Powder Face toward the other camp.

The animal, for a wonder, seemed averse to go, for it

usually went free as the wind whithersoever its rider turned its head, but it seemed to feel that a fearful storm of peril was close at hand, and it obstinately tried to turn its head in the direction that the others were going.

Buffalo Bill, angry at its perverseness, drove his spurs deep in the flanks of the noble animal, and it bounded swiftly toward the camp of the strangers.

Almost at the same instant the brave scout was made aware of the danger which the animal strove to keep him out of, for as it bounded on it nearly leaped over an Indian who was creeping along in the grass, and Bill saw not only this one but a dozen more to his right and left, and knew then that a large band was surrounding the camp of sleepers.

To think and to act were with him one and the same thing. To insure the safety of Dove-Eye, Spotted-Tail, and Dave Estes, he would ride in an opposite direction from that taken by them, dash through the camp of the sleeping strangers and wake them to resistance, and, if possible, make good his own escape up the river, or by crossing it on a horse which was as good in swimming as in running, and, thus throw his enemies off the trail.

So, with a wild yell of warning, firing right and left with his revolver, and sending two red men to their last sleep, he drove madly through the camp of Captain Boyd.

As he went he shouted:

"Up and to arms! The reds are all around you!"

The next instant he was aware that another horse was close behind him, and as he dashed forward over another line of Indians, all now yelling and firing, he turned and saw that the Indian girl, Dove-Eye, had followed him, and was close by his side.

"Ride, girl—ride as you never rode before!" he shouted, as he checked his own matchless horse that she might keep under his protecting arm.

At the same instant he saw a dark mass of horsemen directly in his front, and by the spears bristling high in the air he knew that the main body of mounted Indians were before him.

"Turn—turn and follow!" he cried to Dove-Eye, and he wheeled Powder Face directly to his left into the thick willows which fringed the river-bank.

Dove-Eye turned as quickly as he did, and the two went crashing through the brush and in a few seconds both horses were in the stream swimming for the other shore.

Meantime a terrible fire from the breech-loading guns of the white party told that they had been aroused in time to make a deadly resistance, and the answering yells and rapid shots of the Indians indicated that it was a sanguinary battle—for life on the one side, for scalps and plunder on the other.

The noise, the first heat of excitement, favored Buffalo Bill and the beautiful Indian girl in their bold attempt to escape—in the only feasible plan, indeed, to get away. For the narrow river, fringed by thick growing willows, was passed in a few seconds, and the scout, with Dove-Eye by his side, on her own strong prairie horse, had at least a start, if their trail was discovered and pursuit made.

Buffalo Bill paused scarce a second after crossing. He only took time to change his needle gun for the Henry rifle, which hung at the back of his saddle, so that he could have more than one shot ready, if pursued, and then he said, in a low tone, to Dove-Eye:

"Keep close to me—I shall keep under cover and follow the river. If they do not strike the trail of your father and my mate we will join them below."

"I will follow where Long-Rifle leads. I am his slave forever," said Dove-Eye, and her horse was turned upon his trail.

"Ah, what is that?" cried Bill, an instant later, as a wild, peculiar shout, followed by a succession of Indian yells, reached their ears.

"Spotted-Tail, my father, is a prisoner, in the hands of the Black-Foots," said Dove-Eye, mournfully. "I knew his cry," she continued, "and I understand theirs. He turned to look for Dove-Eye, who could not help following Long-Rifle, her heart's lord, and he has been captured. He will be a great treat. He is a big chief. They will burn him in the grand council. He will die in the fire."

"Not if I can help it," said Buffalo Bill, as he checked his horse. "I have shaken hands with him and ate meat by his side. He shall be rescued."

"You are but one. You can do nothing," said Dove-Eye, sadly. "You cannot help him, but you, too, will die."

"Not easy, my little gal, not easy, for I have a good deal to live for. But I can't let them cussed Black-Foots have things all their own way. Hear 'em yell. They've wiped out or captured the party of white men, for the firing has ceased. Gal, will you obey my wishes?"

"Dove-Eye is the slave of Long-Rifle. She will do all that he tells her to do."

"Then, Dove-Eye, ride while you can, swiftly down the river, close under cover of the trees, till you reach the great bend below. Before then it will be light. Ride directly toward the first peak which you will see where the sun rises. Keep on as fast your horse will go and not give out, and stop as little as you can till you get to Fort Thompson. There you will find a young chief, a pale-face, with long hair like mine. His name is General Custer. He has warriors and horses, and when he is told that I am in trouble up here in Wind River Gap he will not rest till he reaches me. Now go—for I shall stay to watch the Black-Foots, and to try to save your father."

The Indian girl hesitated, looked up pleadingly in his face, and said:

"Do not tell Dove-Eye to go away from you. She would rather die near Long-Rifle than leave him when danger is all about him."

"If Dove-Eye goes to call his friends to help him she does the best thing can she do for his safety," said Buffalo Bill, gravely. "Alone I can hide and watch those demons and see where they go and what they mean to do. Dove-Eye could not help me in this. She would be in the way. The Black-Foots shall not take me. But I will watch them till my friends come. When Dove-Eye comes back with the white warriors she will find signal papers in the camp we left yesterday, and they will give news to the long-haired general. Go now, Dove-Eye, and the Great Spirit help you."

Dove-Eye sighed, but she turned her horse down the river and in a few seconds was out of sight.

Buffalo Bill now led his horse into the water in the edge of the thicket, and following the stream for several hundred yards, went up against the current so as to leave no trail. Then at a spot where the hard shelving rock would receive no impression, he led the horse out, secured him in the thick grass near by, and then stood and listened to the noise made on the other bank of the river by the Indians.

He soon became satisfied that they had several prisoners in hand and were looking for more. He could hear them

riding up and down the stream, and he felt sure their search would be keen and enduring when Dove Eye and he were not found. If her trail was taken nothing but the fleetness of her horse and its endurance could save her, for beyond the great bend she had an open country of at least a half-day's ride to cross where it was almost impossible to hide and equally impossible to avoid leaving a trail. As to himself Buffalo Bill knew his peril, but he had been too often in such scrapes to feel bad about it.

CHAPTER VI.

RED PLUME'S TRICK.

Anger-fire shone in the eyes of Cindah the Sunflower, when the young Indian warrior, Red Plume, was seen bringing not only her horse and his own, but another animal, noted for spirit and speed, for the use of Kincatah, the one-eyed watch-keeper over Cindah.

"Ho!" cried the old witch. "The Sunflower sees how Red Plume obeys her wishes. He knows his duty to Wanda too well to anger me. Look at the horse he brings. It is neither one-eyed nor lame. Now Cindah may ride, but Kincatah rides with her."

Cindah did not answer. But her face flushed as Red Plume led the horses up and her looks told him of her displeasure.

"Kincatah should take her blanket. It will be cold on the hills!" said the warrior.

"Red Plume is good. He cares for the feelings of the old," said the hag, and she went into the lodge to get a blanket.

"Why did Red Plume disobey me?" asked Cindah, angrily, as soon as the other was gone.

"That she might be alone in her ride with Red Plume, who would die to render her service," said the young Indian. "Be still and watch. You will soon see why Red Plume brought that horse for Kincatah."

Kincatah came out, wearing the long robe of scarlet cloth which Wanda had laid aside, and Red Plume instantly assisted her to mount the horse which he had saddled and bridled for her.

The old hag put on a great many airs, on receiving so much attention, and when mounted on the restive steed, turned to Cindah, and said, condescendingly:

"We are now ready—Red Plume can wait on you."

At that instant Red Plume dextrously slipped one of the broad pods of the prickly pear, full of thorns, under the tail of the horse which Kincatah rode, and the animal feeling the keen torture darted forward in uncontrollable speed.

Cindah saw the action, and as the horse darted away with the old hag clinging to its back and tugging helplessly at the bridle, she understood the intentions of Red Plume, and but for the laughter which overcame her would have thanked him for his act.

Cindah could hardly mount the horse which Red Plume held for her, for she was watching the red robe of Kincatah fluttering far off down the valley as the horse madly rushed on stung by its unending torture.

When she was on her horse she turned to Red Plume, and said:

"It was good in Red Plume to get that old witch out of my way. I hate her!"

"Red Plume would die to serve Cindah. She is as far above him as the moon that walks among the stars, but he can look at her and be happy."

"Red Plume is very good. But he must be careful and not show that he cares for Cindah. Yellow Bear will kill any one who looks on her with eyes of love as he did the noble white captive whom he spared so long that he might teach Cindah how to read the speaking papers and to write, so that she could read the news to Yellow Bear when he captured the mail-bags of the pale-faces. Does not Red Plume remember?"

"Yes; the pale-faced prisoner was killed by Yellow Bear in his passion, because the chief found him kneeling at the feet of the beautiful Sunflower."

"Yes;" said Cindah, with a sigh. "I was sorry though I felt no love for him. But this stranger, who writes to me in such beautiful words, interests me. I might love him."

"Why? The Sunflower has never seen him. He is a mystery, like the sounds we hear in the forest when the storm is near by."

The young Indian spoke eagerly, and seemed to wait her answer with impatience, for he urged his horse up by the side of hers, and looked into her face as they rode on.

"The mystery is to me a delight," she said. "He writes and says he loves me. He tells me that he has seen me when I did not know that he was near; and he will never be far from me—that he will watch over me if danger should approach—that he will read my wishes and carry them out when I least expect it. Three letters, all left in some mysterious way where I can find them, and signed in the same strange manner, have reached my hand, and now I go for the fourth. Had Kincatah ridden with us I could not have gotten it. But I know I can trust Red Plume. He has been my mate and playfellow ever since I can remember."

"He will be true to the Sunflower while he lives!" said the young Indian; "and though he may dare to love her, he will hide his passion, and not be rash, as was the pale-face who lost his life."

"That pale face was your friend, Red Plume!"

"Yes; he was my friend because I loved to serve the Sunflower. But in his hour of doom Red Plume could not raise a hand or speak a word to save him. The anger of Yellow Bear is like that of the storm. The lightning comes and kills before the voice of warning is heard. The pale-face died. He left but two friends to mourn him. One was Cindah the Sunflower—the other was Red Plume!"

"True. Halt here, Red Plume, and watch lest some one sees me, while I go on and see if there is a speaking paper in the hollow-tree."

They were now on the edge of a thick grove on the hillside, and while Red Plume reined in his horse as she requested, the lovely girl rode on by herself to an old tree, which had been blasted by a thunderbolt years before, and now stood dead and leafless among its mates.

Into a small hollow, as high as she could reach sitting on her horse, she thrust her small white hand and brought out a roll of white, thin bark.

This she unrolled. It was full of writing, done in a plain, legible hand, so like that of her pale-face teacher that she could read it readily. Not only the writing, but the language was like his, and she could have fancied that these letters came from him, had she not seen him perish with her own eyes.

He was dead beyond a doubt, these letters were almost a transcript of such as he had written to her while he lived.

Cindah sat motionless on her horse reading the letter,

while the young warrior with a pleased look on his face watched her. It seemed strange, too, that he, by actions and words, professing love himself, should be pleased when he knew that she was reading declarations of love from another. Such was the case and a smile stole over his face when he saw her press the writing to her lips and then place it in her bosom.

He was about to ride up to join her, when he heard a sudden crashing in the branches and underbrush near by, and the next instant he saw the forms of a score or more of mounted painted warriors breaking through the forest at wild speed, riding directly toward her.

"Fly—fly!" he shouted, as he dashed forward to throw his own body between her and peril. "Fly—the Sioux—the Sioux!"

Armed only with a spear, with not even a shield to guard his breast, the young brave dashed on, while Cindah apparently panic-stricken, did not even urge her horse into action, until it was too late for as she saw the lance of Red Plume broken, and himself made prisoner, she found her own horse seized by a brace of warriors, while a third, evidently a chief by his dress and arms, rode to her side.

"Who is this?" he asked, in the Shoshone tongue, understood by almost all the tribes. "She is dressed like the red maidens of the land, but her skin is white and her eyes are blue!"

"She is your captive. Is that not enough? Let him go!" said Cindah, sadly, and she pointed to Red Plume, who was held firmly between two strong warriors.

"You ask liberty for him and not for yourself? He is not your brother. Is he your husband?"

"No. I am the slave of no man. I ask nothing for myself. I am a woman and weak. I can die, and that is enough for me."

"You are too beautiful to die. You are as beautiful as the Red Rose of the Sioux nation, whom we left far away on the banks of the Big Horn. We will take you there that you may see her!"

"I have seen her. She is very beautiful. Her name is Dove-Eye. But she is not there where you left her. I saw her last night. She was riding on a horse, fast bound, and Yellow Bear, the great chief of the Black-Foot, led the horse on as fast as it could run. She was his captive!"

The Sioux chief looked at Cindah with a wondering eye. She spoke earnestly, as if she really had seen the Indian maiden whom she named with her own lips.

"The White Flower speaks strange words. Can she say how Dove-Eye looked?"

"I can. Her long hair flowed down her back until it almost hid a form about the size and shape of mine. She swept on, but her great black eyes flashed like fire. She wore about her neck a string of blue beads and on her wrists armlets of gold!"

The Sioux warriors listened in astonishment, while the white captive thus described one whom they knew so well.

"The White Flower says she saw Dove-Eye but last night?"

"Yes; the Angel of Dreams came to her with the picture in his hand. She saw it plain. But Yellow Bear has not come home. There is his village. He claims me as his child. But the Dream Angel says I am not."

The Sioux chief rode a little apart and conferred with all of his warriors except four left to guard Cindah and Red Plume.

From time to time they looked upon her while they

talked, but in their looks there was more of respect than of any other feeling.

After a short time the young chief, evidently a sub-chief, out on some independent scout, rode back to the side of Cindah, and said:

"I am Young Beaver, and the father of Dove-Eye is my chief. If his daughter is in the hands of Yellow Bear she must not remain here. The White Flower and the young Black-Foot chief must go with Young Beaver and remain in his hands till we meet Spotted-Tail, our chief. We will not hurt you—but you must go with us."

Cindah bowed her head and allowed the young chief to take the bridle of her horse in his hand. Red Plume rode next to her, and thus, keeping out of sight of the village, they skirted the hills and rode eastward in the very direction which Wanda with her warriors had taken.

The party was too small to keep in the open valley where it might be discovered by a larger one, and Young Beaver was evidently a cautious warrior, for he kept the hill range, though he could not there travel as fast as he would otherwise have done.

He was not aware, perchance, that he had got completely over into the hunting-grounds of the Black-Foot, or he would not have been so venturesome, for this was in the height of the hunting season, when almost all the tribe were on the hunt.

He rode on swiftly until night was close at hand, and then, passing the crest of a ridge, he saw before him a well-watered valley, where he could find good camping-ground for the night.

He halted on the ridge a little while to scan the valley and see if it was unoccupied. Then seeing nothing to alarm him, the young chief dashed swiftly down the hill side with his men and the two captives, so as to reach the camping ground before the darkness came on.

Reaching the valley, which seemed strangely scarce of game, they crossed at a gallop and entered a grove of cotton-wood trees on the river bank.

Young Beaver leaped from his horse and turned to help Cindah to alight.

As he did so yells from fully one hundred warriors broke upon his ears, and before he and his braves had a chance to raise a weapon at least half out of their number were stricken down in death, while the rest were captives, bound before they could even try to fly.

They had been seen on the ridge, watched as they descended, and then had ridden as if by some fatality right into the ambush of those who waited for them.

CHAPTER VII.

BUFFALO BILL IN A TIGHT SPOT.

It was but a little while after Buffalo Bill had got Powder Face stowed away in his new hiding-place before it became light enough for him to think he could make out the movements of the Indians on the other side, if he was up in the top of one of the trees which seemed by its height to overtop the rest.

So, leaving his guns below and removing his hunting-coat and belt, he embraced the smooth trunk of the tallest-looking cotton-wood, and by good use of his pliant limbs, soon reached the nearest branches.

It was a matter of considerable labor, for the trunk was more than an armful to the scout, so when he reached the first limb he paused to rest. It was darker up there among the thick branches than he thought it would be,

and he was now certain he could not distinguish things on the plains beyond very clearly, so he thought he would wait and take things easy.

He therefore took a good long rest on the first limb, and then leisurely commenced going higher.

Thicker and thicker grew the leafy branches as he ascended, but that was all the better for him. There would be less danger of his being discovered from his lofty lookout, by those whom he went up there to watch.

He was well up in the tree, almost to its top, when he paused to rest again. And then he started and—we take his word though we almost doubt it—trembled, for he heard a strange purring noise close to him, and he knew, even without seeing it, that he was close to a she panther or cougar, and that most likely her young were with her in the same tree.

Buffalo Bill wished then that he had at least brought his knife and pistols with him when he took to the tree.

He looked cautiously around and soon saw two great balls of fire—so seeming—and then a lesser pair in advance of the first, and as he kept his eyes fixed in that direction, he soon saw, or fancied that he could see, among the dense branches the shape of the animals as they crouched on a limb only a trifle higher than that where he rested.

He could hear the purring noise made by the dam, as if to assure the young one of protection, and it was music to him, for he knew the old one would not spring on him while that noise was continued.

But what was he to do? If he moved, either to go higher or to descend, the animal might take it as an aggressive action and pitch upon him, and bold as our hunter was, he did not wish to risk a rough-and-tumble fight with a cougar up in a tree at least sixty or seventy feet from the ground.

So our hero, almost holding his breath, kept his eyes fixed on the fiery orbs of the larger animal and remained motionless, waiting for daylight to come, when he hoped it would leave him, for he knew that such beasts, unless wounded, will not as a general thing face a human being in the light of day.

How slow the time went. But at last the animal began to act uneasy. It seemed to desire a closer acquaintance with the intruder, or else to get between him and its cub.

Buffalo Bill felt the limbs shake with its great weight, as it crept on until it had passed over the cub and was almost up the trunk of the tree, and certainly within twice its length of him.

Here it stopped, and rearing up against the trunk of the tree, scratched against the bark with its long claws as if to terrify its visitor away.

Buffalo Bill was contented that it should use its claws in that way, as long as they did not come in contact with his bark. He could now see plainly the shape of his huge antagonist, for light was dawning in the east, and the animal reared up at its full height on the branch and peered from behind the tree-trunk at Buffalo Bill to make out what he was by the coming light.

Slowly, but steadily, the hunter drew himself up to his full height by an overhanging branch and there, when daylight came, he stood, face to face with a large and as fierce a looking panther as man ever faced or saw.

"It was war now—but a strange war. The human eye against that of the beast! For Buffalo Bill knew well if his glance wavered he was lost. The animal would leap upon him in a second, if he but winked or lost the eye."

charm with which he held it.

Thus for minutes the man and the panther stood, and then slowly the panther drew back, very slowly, still keeping its eye on him until an intervening branch broke the spell.

Then with a wild scream the panther leaped off into the branches of another tree, followed by its cub, and Buffalo Bill, drawing a long breath, said:

"Thank Heaven, that cuss has gone. 'Twas about the worst scare of my whole life!"

The cry of the animal, as it leaped from tree to tree, was heard farther and farther away, and the hunter, now satisfied that his peril was over from that source at least, turned to see what the Indians were doing.

He gave but one earnest look at a scene almost within rifle shot, and then crying:

"I'll stop that game if I die!" he descended from the tree.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DARING RESCUE.

The sight which had made Buffalo Bill descend that tree so rapidly, uttering the expression that he would spoil that game or die, was one of such extreme peril to his partner in many a wild scout and fierce Indian battle, that we must be pardoned if we pitch across the river ahead of Buffalo Bill to see what it is.

When, almost at the start, Spotted-Tail missed Dove-Eye from his side, he halted and would not ride on, though Dave Estes, surmising she had gone with Buffalo Bill, declared that the scout would take good care of her and bring her off safe.

Spotted-Tail was obstinate and would not go on without her, and the consequence was that in the heat of the argument made by Dave, while he strove to urge the chief on in his flight, both were surprised and captured by the Black-Foot.

On being brought back to the spot where Captain Boyd and his party had camped, Dave was rejoiced not to see the faces of either Buffalo Bill or Dove-Eye there—neither did he see their scalps, though every man of Boyd's party, but the captain, had been killed and scalped.

Not without some satisfaction, it appeared however, for at least a score of dead Indians and a good many wounded ones testified to the desperate nature of their resistance.

Boyd, Spotted-Tail, and Dave Estes appeared to be their only prisoners.

A big fire was kindled at the camp when these were brought together, and then for the first time Dave Estes knew into whose power he had fallen.

A chief, past middle-age, tall and kingly in look, with his right arm bound in splinters, advanced to where Spotted-Tail and his captive companions stood.

"Chief of the Sioux, do you know me?" asked this chief.

"Yes," said Spotted-Tail, bitterly. "I know you. You are Yellow Bear, the thief who stole my child, my Dove-Eye, away from me in the night like a coward. But Long-Rifle broke the arm that would have slain her, and he has carried her back safe to her people."

"It is a lie. She is on the plains yet and my warriors will take her trail when the sun comes up, and she shall be brought back to see her father die. Then she shall be the wife of Yellow Bear."

"Never—you hollow-hearted cuss," cried Dave Estes, as careless of life as Spotted-Tail himself. "She is safe with

the best man that ever scalped a red. Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"What dog are you, to bark so loud," said the chief, angrily.

"I'm a sworn brother of Buffalo Bill, whose bite is worse than my bark, as that arm of yours can tell."

"Ugh! You are a brother to the pale-face who took Dove-Eye from me. Good, I will make you eat fire after I eat my breakfast."

"Pile in, old cuss. I'm not afeared of fire. I've scalped about a hundred of your sort and I reckon I can afford to go on that."

"Who are you?" asked the chief, to Captain Boyd.

"I was captain of the men whom your warriors have killed. I am now nothing but your prisoner."

"A friend of Spotted-Tail?"

"No—I never saw him before."

"What are you doing in the hunting-grounds of the red men?"

"Passing over them from the great waters where the sun sets to the big sea where it rises. I have not warred on the red man—why has he warred on me and mine?"

"Because he hates the pale-faces. He would sweep them away as the red fire sweeps the grass from the plains."

"They are as many as the leaves on the trees. They are rooted like the pines on the mountains."

"The winter of the redman's hate shall blast them if they are as the leaves on the trees. The fire of his anger shall burn them, if they be rooted like the pines in the mountains. Yellow Bear hates the pale-faces. He has the scalps of many on his lodge poles. He will have more. The young brave may get ready to sing his death-song as soon as he gets to the village of Yellow Bear. He shall go in company with Spotted-Tail to the spirit land. This other dog shall die at sunrise."

Yellow Bear glared fiercely at Dave Estes when he said this.

"All right, old rooster," said the dauntless scout. "The sooner I'm out of your sight the better for my eyes. There is no love lost between us."

Yellow Bear made no reply to him, but he ordered several of his braves to plant a stake in the open plain and to gather dry fagots so as to have all ready for the torture.

Meantime he had parties out in search of Buffalo Bill and Dove-Eye, for he would not believe they could be far away. They had been seen and recognized by some of his men, at the first onset, and he did not believe they could escape.

The torture-post was soon set in the ground, the wood gathered, and just at the dawn of day Dave Estes, who had been tightly bound from the start, was led to the spot where Yellow Bear meant to sacrifice him.

The brave little scout showed no fear, and replied to the taunts and insults of the warriors in bitter scorn, telling them that they were squaws and knew nothing more than to taunt a helpless enemy. He boasted of the scalps he had taken and of the dead he had left of their race for the wolves to feed upon on the plains. He angered them so much that they could hardly restrain themselves from killing him on the spot, instead of waiting for the hour of torture which Yellow Bear had said should be when the first rays of the morning sun shone upon his face.

Indeed this was what the gallant young scout desired. A sudden shot or blow to take him quickly beyond the power of pain, instead of the wild agony of death by fire.

But Yellow Bear had spoken his doom—the braves dared not anticipate it and they held back their weapons while he laughed their taunts to scorn.

He was bound to the post, the fagots were heaped around him, and now the light of coming day grew stronger and stronger. The sun would soon rise and then the torture would begin.

Spotted-Tail looked with pride in the face of the young hero, while tears of pity fell from the eyes of Captain Boyd.

Dave paid no heed to either of these; he was thinking and hoping that Dove-Eye and Buffalo Bill were beyond the reach of those who were about to sacrifice him.

The warriors now formed a circle about the post and began the dance of torture and the song of triumph. One brave stood near the post, with a lighted brand in his hand, and as the others circled around he shook it before the face of the doomed captive, whose fate was delayed but for the uprising of the sun.

Brighter and brighter came the light, while in the east the sky was all aglow with the red reflection from the sun so nearly up.

Yellow Bear now came into the circle. His face expressed his hate, and in a tone of bitterness he said:

"The dog who is a brother to Long-Rifle is about to roast in the fire which the Black-Foot will kindle."

"I'm not a scarecrow like you, to fizzle. I'll burn clear and go up like the sun, bright and shining," cried the scout. "Burn away, tadpole—burn away and don't spend a year in talking about it."

"The Father of Light is rising," said the chief, sternly. "Let the fire drink the blood of the pale-faced dog."

At that dread moment, as the brave bent down with his lighted torch, a bullet pierced his brain, and the next second a man mounted, leading another horse, bounded into the ring of yelling demons, and before a second elapsed Dave Estes was free and upon his own horse.

It was Buffalo Bill who was by his side, and as he handed Dave one revolver, he used the other in the line of redmen who were in his way, and as both men rode swiftly away over the plain they left seven or eight dead warriors in their trail, while the rest, like Yellow Bear, were for an instant so utterly astounded that they did not think of pursuit, or of firing on the rescued man or his rescuer until both were beyond shot.

Away sped Buffalo Bill on the matchless Powder Face, the horse which had beaten the fastest stock of the Pawnee nation, while Dave Estes on his own favorite Black Hawk rode close on his heels, with his good Spencer rifle once more ready for work, for it had not been taken from his saddle, and when Buffalo Bill, crossing the river, came upon the horses fastened in the edge of the grove, he saw and secured the steed of Dave to aid in his bold attempt to save him.

"Let us take down the river—it is our best chance, mate," cried Dave to Buffalo Bill, as they swept beyond rifle shot of the Black-Foot, who were now mounting in pursuit.

"Not for the world, Dave," cried our hero. "Any route but that. Dove-Eye has gone that way to get Custer and his men to come to our help. Our horses are good—we can lead these cusses all day and pick off the nearest, when we choose, at long range. We will bear off to the northwest, and they'll all follow us, and none will take her trail."

"Agreed, Bill—agreed. I thought my time had come when that black-muzzled cuss bent down to set fire to, the

timber stacked around me."

"You were in close quarters, and if I hadn't dropped him so sudden and charged yelling, I doubt if I could have got you off with a whole skin. We have had better luck than I expected."

The two men were all this time riding at the topmost speed of their horses, in a directly contrary direction from that taken by Dove-Eye, and as Buffalo Bill looked back, he saw the whole band of Black-Foot apparently in pursuit of him and Dave.

The two brave men had a long start, and though they purposely slackened their speed so as not to tire their horses out thus early in the day, they still kept far in advance of their pursuers.

But before they had ridden more than two or three leagues, they were obliged to change their course more to the north, for away to the west the quick eye of Buffalo Bill detected a fresh body of mounted men, whom he supposed with good reason to be Black-Foot coming to join their chief.

This alteration, of course, took him from the direct line to the hills, which he meant to follow until he reached them, hoping then in the night-time, aided by some of the many water courses there, to hide his trail and elude pursuit.

It would now be a matter of endurance and speed with them and their pursuers.

On—on rode the heroic scouts, their noble horses yet fresh and strong, and as they left mile after mile behind them, the more scattering became the line of those who pursued.

At high noon, when Buffalo Bill and Dave halted to water their horses in a stream that came cold and clear from the hills to the west, only a few—not more than a dozen—of all who started in the morning were yet in sight.

"We'll take it easier, Dave, from this on," said Buffalo Bill. "I don't want to get too far from the gang, for I am going to save Spotted-Tail yet. We can use up these fellows at long range, and then choose our distance from the rest till Dove Eye brings Custer up; for I know she will—that gal is lightning when she rides. When I told her she must go this morning, while I staid to look after you and her father, she went off like a streak."

"All right, mate. We can take the few that follow now without leaving this drink."

"We could, but we'll draw them a little farther, for if any turn back, we might lose 'em. We'll keep them till we can find cover, and then let them get so near that none can get away when we begin to throw lead."

"You're right again, Bill—you're always right. You've got the coolest head and the steadiest nerve of any man on the plains."

"That will do for you to say, Dave. But come on—I want to find the cover I spoke of."

Buffalo Bill now set Powder Face into a gallop again, and the two men rode full another league without a halt.

Then coming to a country which was a little rolling, with here and there a clump of rocks, they looked for cover, and soon found it.

Behind a clump of rocks and sage-brush they halted and dismounted, letting their horses nibble at some bunch grass, while the riders waited for the pursuers to close.

When they came within very long range there was but seven left of the mounted warriors, and these came slowly, as if their horses were nearly tired out.

"I wish there were twenty now, when we have such good cover," said Dave, as the seven drew nearer and nearer, following the trail of those whom they could no longer see.

"I am not greedy," said Buffalo Bill, with one of his quiet, peculiar smiles. "Seven will do for supper. We will have more ammunition left for the next tussle."

The seven warriors were now in easy range, but the two scouts, sure of them whenever they chose to open fire, were in no hurry. They waited to see if any more would heave in sight.

When the first of these was within sixty or seventy yards and the hindmost not more than three hundred, Buffalo Bill quietly asked Dave if he was ready.

"Yes,—which one shall I take?" said Dave.

"You take the nearest and I'll drop the laziest cuss of the lot, the fellow in the rear. That'll bring the rest to a standstill, and ten seconds more must end the job."

"All right, Bill. Say the word, for I've got my level."

"Fire as you hear the click of my gun," said the scout.

The next instant both rifles sent their unerring bullets forth and the two Indians singled out went from their horses at the same instant. The rest, as the brave scouts expected, halted, but it was too late for their safety.

Shot after shot, as quick as lightning flashes from a storm-cloud, flew from the ready rifles, and quicker even than these lines have been penned, the pursuit was ended.

Seven warriors lay dead upon the ground and seven tired horses turned away to rest and to graze, free from their cruel riders' lash.

"Now, Dave, we may as well look for meat for supper, and then for a place to camp up toward the hills," said our hero, coolly. "I don't believe we'll be troubled much more, if at all, to-day, and we'll hide our trail when we get water, as we shall soon."

"That is so, mate—and there is an antelope in reach," said Dave, sending a ball to the heart of the animal as it stood for an instant on a ridge looking to see what was there.

He rode over and in a few minutes a hind quarter, all he cared to carry, was hanging to his saddle, and then joining his mate, Dave turned with Buffalo Bill toward the mountains to the west.

For the scouts were determined as soon as possible to gain a point from which with their field glasses they could scan the country below and watch the movements of the Indians and see when the troops were on the march, for Buffalo Bill felt confident that Dove-Eye had escaped, he having drawn, as he believed, all the Indians' attention to his own trail.

They rode on in silence for a time, and on reaching an elevation where, screened by overhanging trees, they could look back over the plains, they made a temporary halt.

"Hallo—what's them?" said Dave Estes, pointing to some tracks fresh made in a sandy spot.

"Panthers—a pair of them!" said Buffalo Bill, glancing down. "And they put me in mind of a little story. My Cousin Lizzie—you've heard me brag of her—a soldier's daughter, with the bravery of a soldier in her own pure heart—she and I had a panther fight once worth bragging of."

"Tell me about it, Bill," said Dave, eagerly, for he knew how seldom the brave scout could be induced to tell of his own adventures.

"I will, while the horses rest and feed," said Bill, and he went on, as follows:

"You see, Cousin Lizzie is an Eastern girl, but she learned to love adventure when she went with her father, the colonel of the old Ninety-seventh Pennsylvania, to Florida during the last war, and she came out here to see something new in that line with Sister May and myself. Cousin Lizzie rides as well as any female that ever sat in a saddle, and she used to join Sister May and me in all our hunts near home.

"We were all up on the Loup one time, on a hunt, and I went out a little way from camp, my pet of a watch-dog, Buff, following, to cut some small poles that we wanted in camp, and Lizzie went along.

"We had just entered a thick bit of timber, when I heard the dog yell. It had run on ahead, you see. By the way the animal talked I knew he was in trouble, and I made tracks for him in a hurry. When I got there he had hold of one panther, and a big one he was, while another was just about making dead dog-meat of him.

"I didn't take time to think, but I whipped out my knife and went in. It was hot, Dave, you bet your life it was, but I wasn't going to let the poor dog go under without help.

"The first thing I knew one panther had me by the arm, while I was slicing into the other and then my brave Cousin Lizzie dashed in and took a part in the play. She had caught up the hatchet which I had dropped, and, quick as lightning, she drove it into the brain of the panther, which had me by the arm.

"The fight didn't last much longer. She had killed the worst one of the two and a single blow from my knife gave the other his quietus, as Uncle Henry says, and all was over. It was a tough fight but thanks and all honor to my brave little cousin, it was gallantly won. I've never seen a panther track since without thinking of that fight. But, Dave, we must move on—this is too near the reds for a halt just now."

CHAPTER IX.

CINDAH'S MYSTERIOUS COMMUNICATION.

It was not until her late captors were defeated and most of them stricken down, that Cindah the Sunflower, knew who it was that had ambuscaded and attracted them, or realized whether she was only changing from one captor to another, or was once more free.

For it was twilight and one Indian yells so like another, she could not tell what tribe made the sudden and unexpected attack.

But now she found that it was Wanda herself who headed this party, and who had remained there to rest while only her best mounted warriors had gone on with Yellow Bear, who had met her in this valley.

Wanda, when fires were lighted, looked angrily at Cindah, and asked how it was that she had been captured with only Red Plume in her company.

Cindah, ever fearful of the wrath of this fierce woman, for more than once she had beaten her cruelly, answered that she had ridden a little way from the village and was in sight of it, when these Sioux rode suddenly up and surrounded her. Red Plume had made a brave resistance, she added, but was overpowered.

"Where was Kincatah, the One-Eyed?" asked Wanda. "I bade her on no account to lose sight of you."

"She rode with us, but she would have a high spirited horse, and it ran away with her," said Cindah, who could

hardly restrain her mirth as she remembered the way the old hag went flying out of sight with her red robe streaming behind her.

"She was a fool. If her neck is broken it will be small loss," said Wanda, angrily. "Who are these?" she asked as she looked on the prisoners.

"Sioux, belonging to the tribe of Spotted-Tail," was the answer.

"Good. Yellow Bear will know what to do with them when he returns. He came to me empty-handed, as I said he would, and with an arm broken. He now seeks revenge. But he will have no success. I frowned when he went. He will come back again empty-handed, but I will give him these prisoners for the torture-stake."

Wanda now ordered all the camp-fires lighted, and while her warriors cooked and ate their meal, her supper was served.

Then, with a huge tree at her back, she sat and gazed into the fire, while near her Cindah reclined on the soft grass, thinking of the mysterious stranger who had written to her four times, asking herself if he would indeed be near her, as he said he would in his letters, when she was in trouble.

Red Plume stood with his eyes apparently fixed upon the moon now up in the clear sky, though at times he dropped a furtive glance upon the lovely face and form of Cindah, as the firelight fell in soft splendor upon it.

At last, Wanda closed her eyes, and her heavy breathing told that she slept.

Now Cindah drew from her bosom the roll of bark which she had taken from the hollow tree, and with a pleased look she read it over and over.

Suddenly she started, and a cry nearly broke from her lips, for another roll, almost like the first dropped directly in her lap.

Cindah looked quickly around to see if any one had noticed this, but the only one near who appeared to be awake was Red Plume, and he was standing with his head turned away, as if he was listening to some sound.

Cindah looked eagerly all around her, up into the trees, and in every direction, but she could see no stranger.

She unrolled the bark, and, in the same characters, but evidently written in haste, and apparently with a piece of coal, were these words:

"He who loves Cindah, the beautiful Sunflower, is near her now. She may sleep in peace, for he will watch over her safety. The winged Angel of Dreams will hover about her and give her bright visions."

"Near me now?" she murmured. "Where can he be? And who? In what shape can I see him? Oh, how strange this mystery! A spirit cannot write and leave these tangible signs of presence. Oh, that I might see him!"

A sigh, full and tremulous, reached her ears. From whence she knew not. But she knew she heard it.

She looked up into the shadowy trees, she looked on the sleeping forms about her, at Red Plume standing in the distance silent and immovable as a statue. It could not be he. He could not write or use the beautiful language found in her letters.

Who could it be? Where was he now? Why could she not, even if but for an instant, look upon him?

All these questions rose swiftly in her mind, but no answer came.

"I will try to sleep. Maybe the blessed Angel of Dreams will help me," she murmured; "and I will ask the Spirit

to show him to me, so I may remember him if he comes before my waking eyes."

The lovely girl pressed the missive last received to her red, pouting lips, and then placed it with the other in her bosom.

Then she lay down on a blanket which Red Plume had spread for her after the camp-fires were lighted, and soon she slept.

CHAPTER X.

A PALE-FACE RECOGNIZED.

Before day dawned Wanda, the Black-Feet queen, had her warriors astir, for the distant sound of guns had reached her ears, and she knew that Yellow Bear had met enemies, for the firing had been sharp and continuous.

At the first gleam of light sufficient to show a trail, she moved on at the head of her band, bidding Red Plume attend Cindah the Sunflower, who rode farther back in the line.

A special guard, was placed over the Sioux prisoners, whom Wanda designed as a pleasant surprise to Yellow Bear.

"Did Cindah the Sunflower see the blessed Spirit of Dreams last night?" asked Red Plume, in a low tone, as they rode along.

"Yes," said the lovely girl.

"Is it right that Red Plume should hear what the Dream Spirit told her?"

"The Dream Spirit came to me in a new shape. He was a young pale-face, with dark eyes and long flowing hair as black as night itself. He held a roll of white bark in his hand, and on it was written: 'I love Cindah, the White Rose of the Prairie.'"

"A pale-face? Is Cindah sure that his face was white?" asked Red Plume, with a sad, disappointed look.

"Yes; he was young and beautiful to look upon, and his voice was low and sweet, like that of the ring-dove."

"The Dream Spirit is a lie!" murmured the young brave, in a tone too low for her to understand what he said.

But she saw that his face looked dark and troubled, and she said:

"Is not Red Plume, the good friend of Cindah, as well?"

"Yes. But a cloud is on his spirit. He, too, has had a dream."

"Will not Red Plume tell his dream to Cindah?"

The young warrior was about to reply, when there was a sudden commotion in the line and Wanda put the whole column forward at its greatest speed.

The other band, under Yellow Bear, were seen scattered over the plains as if in flight, and the daring queen, thinking that the chief had been attacked by superior numbers, and perhaps defeated, hurried on to his assistance.

Amid all this excitement, Red Plume and Cindah had no further chance to speak, and for miles they sped on in the swift column without exchanging a word or look.

Then Wanda met Yellow Bear, who had remained with a chosen band of warriors while the rest of his braves had dashed away in pursuit of the two scouts.

Yellow Bear had his two prisoners with him.

When Wanda rode up and met her chief, she glanced at Spotted-Tail and at the captive Boyd, and asked:

"Are these all the prisoners Yellow Bear has taken?"

"All," said the chief. "Yet the belts of his warriors

bear the scalps of many pale-faces."

"Where is Dove-Eye, for whom he risked his life so foolishly?" asked the queen.

"She is not here! Dove-Eye, and Long-Rifle, and another pale-face are yet on the plains. But my warriors are on their trail. They will be mine before the sun goes down."

A smile of derision passed over her face, and Wanda was about to speak, when a cry from the lips of Cindah attracted the attention of all.

"Who—who is this?" she cried, as she rode up to Captain Boyd and looked earnestly in his face.

"A pale-face doomed to the torture-stake," said Yellow Bear, sternly.

"No, no, he must not die! He is the Dream Angel whom I saw last night!" she cried.

Had she seen the black, bitter look of hatred cast on that young, fair face by Red Plume, Cindah would have trembled.

"Cindah is a child. She dreams too much. Why is she not at home in the village of Yellow Bear?" asked the chief.

"She said Red Plume were captured in sight of your lodge by the Sioux. Wanda rescued them, and she holds six Sioux captives as a present for her chief," said the queen.

At a signal from the Amazonian queen the prisoners were brought into the presence of Yellow Bear.

Spotted Tail recognized Young Beaver, and asked him why he had let a woman become his captor.

"Because Young Beaver was blind and fell into a trap," said the young chief, bitterly. "The Great Spirit has willed that he should die with his chief."

"The will of the Great Spirit shall be done; and it is not for us to weep over it," said Spotted-Tail, calmly. "We can teach the black man how white warriors die."

Yellow Bear now ordered the column to move west to a camping-ground in sight, where he would wait for his warriors to come in, who were out in pursuit of the fugitives. And, seeing that Cindah looked with strange longing on the face of the young captain, whom she persisted in calling the "Dream Angel," he bade Wanda to keep her close under her own eye and apart from all but the young brave who had long been set apart to wait upon and serve her—Red Plume.

At noon the entire party was in camp on the banks of the river near the place where Buffalo Bill and Dave Estes had first camped.

Here Yellow Bear waited for his scattered warriors to rally, sending up smoke after smoke to show where he was and to hurry their movements.

Spotted Tail looked grimly on while these smokes ascended, for he knew they would serve as signals to rally his warriors, too.

If Dove-Eye had escaped, he would carry the news of his capture to those who would sacrifice a thousand lives to save his—who would rescue him or perish in the trial.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PURSUIT OF DOVE EYE.

When Dove-Eye rode away from Buffalo Bill, to whom unmasked she had cast the first blossom of love, her heart

was too heavy to make her care for peril. But when she thought that his safety would depend entirely on her success in carrying help to him and those whom he was determined to rescue—her father and the Little Brave—she tried to nerve herself to the separation, and to hasten to carry out his wishes.

Reared to a life of strategy and peril she knew that all hope of success in her mission depended upon her getting a fair start, unseen, of all pursuit.

So, while darkness shielded her, keeping close under cover of the trees lining the south bank of the river, she rode as swiftly as her horse would go without the use of the thonged whip which hung at the saddle bow. For she knew that the speed to continue must not be overtaken on the start.

She rode thus fully two leagues before she came to the great bend in the stream, of which Buffalo Bill had spoken.

It was becoming lighter, but was not yet daylight when she reached this spot, and she hastened to cross before the light should enable any one who might be above to discover her in the water, or rising the banks.

She crossed safely, and while the rosy light of the coming day allowed the peaks of which the scout had spoken to stand out boldly to her sight as a guide, she also felt that her danger was just beginning. For in the clear light of early day she knew objects could be seen on the plains for leagues.

Now, heading directly for the distant peak, the brave girl gave her horse his rein and urged him on, for she knew that every mile gained at this point would be the most important of all.

She rode for an hour before she dared to look back, and then it was on the crest of a small knoll from which she knew she could see farther than at any other point, that she glanced over her shoulder to see if she was pursued.

One eager look, and she knew that many were on her track. They were very far in the rear, but she could make out fully twenty horsemen scattered along the plain, and of these at least half were in column and evidently on her trail.

She let her noble steed rest for a few minutes, for she knew now that a long, cruel race was begun, and she must render the animal all the aid she could. Used to riding the wild horses of the prairie without saddle or bridle, she lightened the animal at once of these incumbrances, and carrying now only her father's rifle in her hand, she sprang once more upon the horse, and darted away at renewed speed.

On—on over a treeless plain—on, where only now and then an intervening knoll rose to hide her from her relentless pursuers, the brave girl rode forward, pausing not until a small lake came in sight.

Here for fully ten minutes she rested to let her horse drink from the cool water and lave his tired limbs in the refreshing element.

Her pursuers gained while she thus halted, until she could count them easily. Only six were now in sight, but these seemed well mounted, and they kept close together.

But when, with her horse rested and bravely refreshed she again started forward, the wisdom of her acting became at once apparent.

Her horse had gained renewed vigor and her pursuers were dropped one by one until they were almost out of sight.

Now, with all the cool thought and courage that would

have done credit to a warrior, she gave her horse its will, not urging it beyond its strength, and she felt sure of escape. She would reach the range of her own people, or the fort where the white soldiers lived; and then, if her pursuers still followed her trail, their scalps should hang at her belt.

Her heart grew strong and light, for a glad thought came into it. If she successfully carried out the wishes of the hero of her heart, Buffalo Bill, she would surely win the love for which she longed.

On, on flew her horse, apparently yet strong, while the hot sun rose higher and higher, until passing its meridian, it began to descend.

Once in a long while she looked back, and she became aware that her pursuers yet followed, though they, too, must have halted at the lake to refresh their animals.

But she still dashed forward, now urging her horse to do its best on a level stretch, then letting it breathe as it came to an ascent, confident that by management she could keep it going until night, with its friendly shadows, would come to help her elude those who so persistently followed.

Spotted Tail would have been trebly proud of his child had he been able to know how she was striving to reach those who would help him. Even Buffalo Bill would have given her all the praise she deserved, though he could not give the love for which she strove so hard in this desperate hour.

At last Dove-Eye felt that her horse was weakening. When he reached an ascent, and she allowed him to slacken his speed for rest, she could feel his limbs trembling even while he walked.

And yet her pursuers, six still in number, were in sight and closer than they had been from the start.

Oh, what agony—not fear of death, but of failure to carry out the wishes of her hero-love—this it was that made her heart sick.

She lashed her horse now to its last efforts; far ahead she saw trees, and even if she could gain the forest she might elude those who were in chase. She would gain the woods before they did or she would kill her horse in the attempt.

Her pursuers, near enough to see her almost frantic exertions, now seemed as determined to prevent her success.

Their shrill yells reached her ears, and though she knew no fear of death, her heart was maddened at the thought of failure.

Her noble horse seemed to feel all that she felt. It leaped madly on, even though every leap seemed but a staggering bound which would be its last. Taller and taller loomed up the forest trees.

On—only a mile more and she would be under cover of the wild-wood. Her horse, though black as jet in its native hue, was now white with foaming sweat.

On, the horse staggering at every leap, and now she could see each tree-trunk in the border of the forest.

Oh, hold, hold thy strength, brave steed! but for five hundred yards more and the girl will bound free into the forest shades.

Alas, while now in reach of the deadly rifle-shot, the brave horse makes one fearful leap and falls—a ball has reached his vitals.

Yell after yell of triumph breaks from the pursuers' fiendish lips, for they deem that Dove-Eye is in their power.

The heroic girl is on her feet as her horse falls headlong forward, and now, with her father's rifle in her hand, she turns to face her foes.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SCOUTS SEPARATE.

When Buffalo Bill and Dave Estes reached a peak in the hills which overlooked Wind River Valley, leaving no trail for some miles, because they rode up in the bed of a small stream, they had a fair chance to inspect the country below.

Through a powerful field-glass, a present from his friend and admirer, General Sheridan, Buffalo Bill could distinctly make out the encampment of Yellow Bear, and see that he intended to remain there at least over night, for his hunters were seen killing and dressing game in the vicinity of the camp.

"I do believe the old cuss thinks his braves will find us and take us or our scalps," said Dave. "He wouldn't wait if it wasn't for that, when he must know the Sioux will rally to rescue or revenge their chief."

"He is waiting as much for Dove-Eye as for us," said the older scout. "He has been smitten by her beauty, and it is hard for him to lose her when he has once had her in his possession. I hope she has got off safely. I shall not feel easy till I know she has. If she is captured, farewell to any hope for Spotted-Tail. Yellow Bear would burn him before the Sioux could strike a blow to save him."

"How are we to find out whether she has got through all right or not?"

"We will know, if we see the troops coming, quick enough. But I doubt whether she knows the country. If she has been chased out of the line of peaks which mark Fort Thompson, she'll never find Custer. I feel very uneasy about it."

"So do I," said Dave.

"Uneasy enough to go and look for her trail and to follow it up?" asked Bill, in a careless tone, but with an earnest look in his eyes.

"And leave you, mate, here alone in the hills?"

"I'm better able to take care of myself alone than she is," said Buffalo Bill, dryly.

"That's true as preachin'. But how can I find her trail?"

"Easy, if she crossed the river at the Great Bend and steered due east for Brown's Peak, as I told her to. There is a good mark to find it by. Her horse, I noticed when I rescued her from Yellow Bear, was shod before—it had been shod behind, but the shoes were off."

"You're dreamin', Bill. An Indian horse shod?"

"The Indian horse, I reckon, had been stolen from some emigrant train, or from the Texas border, for I saw a white man's brand on the haunch."

"That accounts for the shoes then. But what will you do if I go and try to take her trail?"

"Wait here or hereabouts, and watch them red cusses down there. If they move—I'll move, and if I see a rocket at night, or three quick black smokes in the day, I'll know where you are and answer you."

"Bill, I've half a mind to go when night sets in."

"Go—Dave—go, and I'll feel the easier for it."

"You'll not run any extra risk and lose your hair?"

"Dave, how often must I tell you that I've done running any risks I can help, since I have my sweet little Lou to live for?"

"Done running risks! That's rich!—when you faced a hundred deaths to get me clear this morning!"

"Well, Dave, that was a little foolish, I know. But, my

boy, I couldn't help it, for I know you would have done all that, or more, for me."

Buffalo Bill laughed, as only he does laugh, when he said this.

"Yes, I would die for you, Bill!" said Dave, earnestly. "I never could go back, and face your wife and sisters, and tell them I had left your bones on the plains!"

"I hope you'll have no occasion to, Dave. But, come, while your horse is filling up on bunch grass, we may as well have some of that antelope over the fire. You'll need all your strength to-night and to-morrow. You have got to dodge the cusses there below, and get far out of sight of any of their scouts before day."

"That's so, if it is decided that I go."

"Of course it is."

Dave said no more, but at once went to slicing up some antelope steaks, while Buffalo Bill made a fire in a little hollow, out of small dry sticks, which blazed up strong and hot, without emitting any smoke.

A greenhorn would have had the Indians looking at a smoke, had he wanted to cook his supper. But old scouts are as wary as Indians are, and never make a smoke or show a light, when either will be attended with danger.

In a little while the scouts had a good, hearty meal ready, and they enjoyed it, for their exercise and long fast had given them voracious appetites.

Meantime, the horses luxuriated on the fine, tender grass which skirted the stream, and received strength while they rested after their long and rapid gallop.

After eating, the two men looked very carefully to their arms, inspected the amount of ammunition on hand, and then, when they had nothing else to do, talked about Spotted-Tail and his daughter, and arranged a plan of signal marks, which Buffalo Bill would leave, if the Indians changed base and he had to follow and watch them.

The moment night set in, Dave Estes mounted his horse, and shaking Buffalo Bill's hand warmly, rode away, taking his course by the evening star.

He knew where the Indians were in camp, and as those who had been out all day had been seen making for camp before dark, he hoped to avoid meeting any of them.

Buffalo Bill was now alone. For a time he stood with folded arms, listening to the sound made by the horse of Dave Estes as the latter rode down the brook; then, when that sound died away in the distance, he looked down at the twinkling light made by the Indian camp-fires.

"I've a good mind to give them red cusses an almighty scare between now and daylight!" he muttered to himself.

Then, on second thought, he added:

"It is better not. It might make Yellow Bear hurry up to get rid of Spotted-Tail and that youngster, Boyd. I feel sorry for that little chap; he is young, and has plenty of grit, too. If I could have got a horse to him when I cut Dave loose, I would have done it. But there was no chance."

Powder Face now left the grass, and came up where Bill was standing.

"How is it, old nag? All safe around here?" asked the scout, as if the horse could really understand the question.

The animal rubbed his head against Bill's arm in a gentle, loving way, and then lay down close to where he stood.

"Tired and sleepy, and all is safe!" said his master, patting the faithful horse, and then he unrolled the blanket from the rear of the saddle, and wrapping himself in it, he lay down with his head upon the side of the horse.

Lay down to rest, knowing that, being as sensitive to

sound as the best watch-dog, the animal would start at the slightest alarm, and arouse him should his slumber be heavy.

The brave scout and hunter lay there, but ere he closed his eyes he breathed a prayer to Heaven for the safety of his dear ones far away, and returned thanks to Him, whose preserving hand had been stretched out over his life, during the perilous hours of that day.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TIGER OF THE COMANCHES.

Never more fiercely did a tigress turn at bay than did Dove-Eye, grandly beautiful in her heroism, when, her faithful horse shot down, she found her hope of escape cut off.

With the loaded rifle of her father in her hand, she stood a second while six Black-Foot fiends came yelling on; then with consummate judgment she shot the foremost dead, with a ball sent so fairly through his heart, that, leaping convulsively from his seat, he left his horse free to continue its course.

The brave girl had no time to reload the rifle, for the other five came charging on; but the horse of the warrior whom she had killed, now lightened of his weight, gained on the others, and, as it neared her, she caught the loose and flying rein, and in an instant more had bounded to its back.

But the animal swerved as it approached her faithful steed, and a ball from one of the pursuing braves struck it in the side, and a second time the noble girl was unhorsed.

Clubbing the empty rifle, she turned to battle to the last without a thought of surrender, and the Black-Foots were close upon her, when out from among the forest trees came the pealing yells of other Indians; and while the Black-Foots drew in their horses close in front of her, a cloud of arrows hurled through the air on either side, and the astonished girl saw the Black-Foots melt down in the agonies of death.

She turned to see whence this unlooked for help came, and her heart sank lower yet in despondency, for she knew at a glance that those were not Sioux warriors who rode out to scalp her enemies, whom they had just slain.

The bright serapes, the long bows and longer lances, told her that they were either Comanches from the far south on one of their far-extended forays, or else the savage Apaches, who, like the wandering Arabs, war with all that they meet.

She had little time for thought. A score of painted, yelling fiends dashed forward and tore the reeking scalps from the heads of the slain warriors, while as many more surrounded her, asking questions in a tongue she could not understand.

She faced them all fearlessly, for her heart was strong to its bravest tension; and when one, a large and hideous wretch, laid his hand upon her shoulder, she hurled him back with an indignant strength and action which brought cries of applauding wonder from the rest, while it so angered him that he drew a knife from his belt and raised it to strike.

At the same instant, while she with scorn on her face folded her arms to receive the unmanly blow, a noble-looking young warrior, with a snow-white plume in a red turban on his head, caught the arm of the savage, and wrenching his knife from him, threw it far out on the

plain, using language which Dove-Eye could not understand.

But the tone of the speaker, and his angry look, told her that he was rebuking the wretch who had laid hands upon her, and the latter now shrank away abashed and mortified.

"Do you speak in the tongue of the pale-faces of the North?" asked the young warrior, who seemed to be a chief, by the respect the others paid to him, for they fell back when he addressed Dove-Eye in English.

"I do," she answered. "And I thank you for rebuking the coward who would raise his hand to a woman."

"Who are you, and of what tribe?" he asked.

"I am Dove-Eye, the daughter of Spotted-Tail, the chief of the Big Horn Sioux."

"The Red Rose of the tribe. Klamat, the Tiger of the Comanches, has heard of you."

"Are you Klamat?" she asked.

"That is my name," he answered, drawing up his tall form proudly.

"Then you are a great brave. You will not make war on a woman?"

"No. Dove-Eye is very beautiful—more beautiful than any maiden in the land of the Comanches. Klamat will make her his wife."

"No. It cannot be. Dove-Eye has given her heart to another. She may not take Klamat for a husband, though his fame is as bright as the stars, and the tribes tremble when they hear that he is near."

"Dove-Eye will change her mind," said the Comanche, calmly. "He will not ask her to hurry. He will give her time to think."

"Dove-Eye needs no time to think of that. But she has something else to think of. Her father is a prisoner in the hands of the cruel Black-Foot. Dove-Eye escaped from them this morning, and was on her way to get help to rescue him. She was pursued by Black-Foot warriors, and had just slain one when the Comanches came and killed the rest."

"Yes, Klamat saw the deed of Dove-Eye. And he said, 'Now have mine eyes looked upon a woman fit to be the wife of a great warrior.'"

"Dove-Eye cares not for life, if her father perishes at the hands of the cruel Black-Foot!"

"Where are they now?"

"In the great gap of the big mountain, to the west, where the River of Storms has its birth!"

"Good. Klamat will go there, and he will take Spotted-Tail out of the hands of his enemies. Then he will bring her father to Dove-Eye, and he will say I have done a good deed for you—then Dove-Eye will be my wife."

Dove-Eye made no answer. She dared not say no—she would not say yes. Neither did she dare to tell him that there was one watching to release her father, who was dearer to her than life.

Klamat interpreted her silence in his favor, and he said:

"An hour's ride from here, in the forest, we have a camp made strong as the pale-faces make theirs. To that camp, with a small guard who will treat her with respect, Dove-Eye will be taken. Klamat will take all his warriors and ride straight for the great gap in the Big Hills. He will find the Black-Foot, and bring Spotted-Tail away from them."

Dove-Eye was helpless. She could not ask for any further favor. But she would risk one plea. She asked that she might ride back with him, for she thought if she

could do no more, she might rejoin Buffalo Bill.

Klamat said:

"No. The Comanches will ride fast. Dove-Eye is already tired. She looks like a flower that wilts and is ready to perish. She must go to the camp of Klamat."

The Indian maiden knew that remonstrance was useless. Words would be wasted. So she bowed her head, and when a horse was brought for her to ride, she mounted it. Handing Klamat the rifle of her father, she said:

"If the Comanche chief sees Spotted-Tail, tell him there is his rifle. Dove-Eye killed one enemy while she carried it."

Then she rode into the forest with her guard.

CHAPTER XIV.

"HALT! WHO COMES THERE?"

It was a strange night. There were no storm-omens, yet every little while a mass of black, broken clouds would pitch up from the west and come rolling and tumbling along far up in the sky, as if driven by quite a gale of wind, though down where Buffalo Bill lay there was no wind, and far down in the valley he could see that the fires burned low and steady. So it was calm there. It was a good time for a philosopher to study the levels of wind-currents. That is, if the thoughts of losing hair would not interfere with his cogitations on science.

Buffalo Bill, tired as he was, lay a long time with his head on that equine pillow, thinking about Dave and Dove-Eye, and also of those afar off whose frequent prayers were ever a hope to him of better things to come in the great hereafter, but at last he fell asleep.

He was awakened, he could not tell at what hour, for the moon was obscured by clouds, by the uneasy action of Powder Face.

The animal, as its master partially raised up, indicated by the usual motion of its ears that it had heard suspicious sounds, and Buffalo Bill felt confident that the danger, whatever it was, was very near, for the animal did not make the slightest motion, but lay still, with its ears pointed forward.

The scout reached carefully for his Henry rifle, and felt at his belt to be sure that knife and pistols were in their places.

For a few seconds all was as still as if no living thing was near.

Then Buffalo Bill heard sounds—very light, but plain and distinct. It was the tread of human beings—light, but plainly the sound of one or more persons coming up the hill in the grass and among the tangled patches of sage-brush.

Neither horse nor man moved, for Buffalo Bill thought that the Indians were thus scouting the hills on foot to find him and his mate. If they heard no sound, lying so low as he did, they might pass him and his horse unnoticed.

Nearer and nearer, walking with excessive caution, the scout heard them come. And it seemed as if they could scent him, for they were coming directly upon him.

He cocked his rifle, for he believed he would have to use it.

"Hark!" said some one in good English. "That was a strange noise!"

"A stick broke!" said another voice, low and soft—plainly the voice of a woman.

"It cannot be Dave, with Dove-Eye—surely!" said the scout, mentally.

Whoever it was, they remained silent, evidently listening for a minute or more.

It seemed a long time to Buffalo Bill, for his nerves were all in tension now.

Then they moved on, and in another minute would be fairly upon him, when the scout, in a low, stern tone, cried out:

"Halt! who comes there?"

"Friend to any one not leagued with the cursed savages."

"Ah, is it you, Captain Boyd? Advance," said Buffalo Bill, in his natural voice. "Who is with you?"

"An angel, I believe; one who has been a saving angel to me, for she cut the thong that bound me about two hours ago, and led me out from among those who meant to roast me alive. She is white and beautiful, though Yellow Bear claims her as his daughter."

"I have heard of a beautiful white girl among the Black-Foot, known as the Sunflower," said Buffalo Bill. "She is supposed to have been stolen from the settlement when young, and raised by them. I saw something about it in the papers not long ago."

"I am Cindah the Sunflower," said the soft voice of the young girl, who now approached the spot where Buffalo Bill stood—he and Powder Face having both risen.

"Well, I am glad you are out of bad hands and in such good company, Captain Boyd," said the scout. "But there'll be a fuss down there when they know you have got away."

Buffalo Bill pointed toward the fires when he spoke.

"Hark! They know it now," said Cindah, anxiously.

"We must not stop. Yellow Bear will hunt us as the gray wolf hunts the wounded deer."

Fierce yells could be heard far down the valley.

"What pains have you taken to conceal your trail?" said Buffalo Bill, earnestly.

"None; we came right along as still and as fast as we could," said Boyd.

"Then when daylight comes they'll follow you easily. We have a few hours to get a start on, and we must play cunning. Both of you walk up the brook three or four hundred yards, then enter the stream and come down a little way in the water, then out on the other side and walk down to where I am."

Captain Boyd and Cindah obeyed without hesitation, and when they were once more by the side of Buffalo Bill they had traversed nearly a quarter of a mile in distance.

"Now follow me, exactly in line, one behind the other, and be careful not to touch a thing on the shore, or to let a step be made out of the water after you enter it," said the scout.

And leading Powder Face, he started toward the plains, entering the water with the head of the horse looking down stream to where the brook widened on a rocky shelf, and there turned up the stream. Now, himself going ahead of the horse, and followed by Boyd and Cindah, the cunning scout went directly up the brook in the swift current, which would wash out every track as fast as it was made.

Meantime, whenever they paused they could hear the noise of the excited Black-Foot on the search far below. Therefore their halts were few and of brief duration.

As they ascended the stream the gorge through which it came narrowed down, and the banks rose high and dark on either side, and it became very difficult to proceed.

At last, and now the glimmer of coming day began to show, they were stopped entirely. A waterfall, which Powder Face could not pass, tumbled down from a lofty ledge. The banks on either hand were also precipitous.

"It seems to me as if we were in a trap," said Captain Boyd.

"We are, if our trail is discovered," said Bill. "But we are in a splendid place for defense. We must wait a little in patience now, and see how things look by daylight."

"We will not have to wait long," said Boyd.

In a short time sufficient light came to the scout to see on his right a great chasm in the cliff where the water at some high flood had swept out huge portions of rock and dirt, leaving room for fifty or sixty men to stand at ease on a dry rock floor.

"We've a good resting-place in there," said Buffalo Bill. "Plenty of room for us, and all out of sight from the banks above. A better hiding-place could not be chosen."

He at once led Powder Face into this great hall, and tearing some grass from the roots in the water's edge, he threw it down for the animal to eat.

He now had time to take a fair look at Cindah the Sunflower.

"Girl, you are beautiful!" he exclaimed, in astonishment, as his eyes wandered over her lovely face and form.

"Oh, if the Dream Spirit will but think so!" she murmured, and looking at Captain Boyd, her face became suffused with blushes.

"What does she mean by the Dream Spirit?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"That appears to be the name she has given me!" said Captain Boyd, and he blushed as deeply as Cindah had done.

"You are he who came to me in my dream—he who whispered the sweet words 'I love you,' in my ear, and to whom I have given my heart, my soul!" cried Cindah, passionately. "You are he whom I have led away from death, that you may be mine, mine forever!" and the lovely creature threw her round, white arm about the captain's neck.

He seemed as much embarrassed as a schoolboy getting hugged before all the school, but she did not notice it. Her head was bowed upon his breast.

"A pretty clear case of love at first sight," murmured Buffalo Bill, "and as it stands, rather useful, since it has gotten its object out of rather a tight place."

"If you and the Sunflower will remain here quiet and look out for Powder Face," he added to Captain Boyd, "I will get up above and reconnoiter. I see a place where I can climb the cliff, and then I will take a tree and try to find out whether we are followed."

"All right; we will wait and watch," said the young captain.

"I will leave both my needle-gun and rifle!" said the scout. "They will only be in my way in climbing. But I shall keep my knife and pistols with me—I got a scare by going without them yesterday morning, which I shall not get over in a year!"

"I will take care of the weapons, and use them if necessity bids!" said Boyd. "Do not expose yourself unnecessarily, my brave friend!"

"I'm not in the habit of doing that?" said the scout, carelessly.

He now patted Powder Face on his neck, and said:

"Stay here, old boy, and feed till I come back."

The animal looked up as if it understood him, and went to eating when he turned away.

CHAPTER XV.

"I'LL GET HER OUT OF THEIR CLUTCHES, OR I'LL LOSE MY HAIR!"

When Dave Estes left Buffalo Bill he kept down the stream until he reached the plain, and then he left it and bore off directly to the south-east until he struck a line reaching from the—to him—well-known great bend of the river and the peak which Buffalo Bill called Brown's Peak, named after a dear, old friend of his in the Fifth Cavalry. Then, knowing that this was the line the scout had told Dove-Eye to follow, Dave rode for the peak at a fair rate of speed, considering the travel his horse had undergone.

When day dawned, Dave had left the timber on Wind River out of sight, and was nearing that below the peaks ahead.

He now looked intently for the trail of a horse as he rode on, but for a long time found no tracks. But at last, he found some quite fresh. They were numerous, too; but the horses were unshod, and they were in column, heading to the west.

"She must have met some of her tribe and returned," he said, as he examined the track carefully. "I will ride a little way, and see if I can find the track of her horse among them."

Dave went on a half-mile or more, and found a place where the column had halted, and, in a sandy spot, he found other tracks. These were of the horses going east, and one track was plainly that of a horse shod as Buffalo Bill had told him the horse she rode was shod.

"I'll never leave this track till I find the girl or horse!" said Dave, when he became satisfied that he was now on the trail.

And with his eyes directed to the ground, he dashed on, soon finding that others were on her trail as well as himself.

Nearer and nearer he came to the forest ahead. The day was well advanced—in truth, it was full noon when Dave, now within a mile of the woods, saw several dark objects ahead of him, apparently low down on the ground.

He halted, took out his glass, and soon made out that men and horses, apparently dead, were scattered here and there between him and the woods.

"Indians, if alive, wouldn't lie about loose and open like that," he muttered. "There has been a fight!"

He spurred his horse to full speed, and in five minutes he was on the late battle-ground. He recognized the slain and scalped Indians to be Black-Foot. He saw at once, by the peculiar arrows with which they had been killed, that it was the work of Comanches.

For your true scout knows every weapon and mark of all the tribes among whom he has mingled.

But when he came to the two dead horses, killed by rifle balls, and one of these the shod horse of Dove-Eye, he was puzzled again. He thought a moment, and then it partly came out.

The Black-Foot had nearly overtaken Dove-Eye, he reasoned, and she had shot one with her father's rifle, for Bill had told him she carried it. They in turn had shot her horse and then the Comanches had charged from the woods and killed them.

But what had become of Dove Eye? That was now Dave's biggest trouble.

Carefully he looked over all the trail-ground.

He found where a large body, probably fifty or sixty mounted warriors, had ridden off to the west, crossing the trail of Dove-Eye and her pursuers, and heading for Wind River Gap. It was a wonder, indeed a Providence, that he had missed this party in the night.

Looking farther, he found a return trail, with only a few horses, leading into the forest.

Taking this, he soon came to a tangible proof that Dove-Eye was with this party.

For the brave girl, with a forethought none but one reared as she had been would be likely to possess, had torn a portion of the beaded border of her dress and dropped it on a rock by which the trail led.

When Dave picked this up, he muttered:

"Dove-Eye is a prisoner to the Comanches. I'll get her out of their clutches, or I'll lose my hair!"

He now rode cautiously on, for he was on a plain and well-beaten trail, and he knew that there was danger at any moment of meeting an enemy, or a body of them.

He did not like to leave his horse, but when he came to a stream, he concluded he could reconnoiter best on foot, so he led the horse up the brook to a thicket out of sight of the main trail and left him in a savannah of marsh grass. He didn't tie the animal—he knew it would wait for him, and if left to feed would not be apt to make any noise which would attract an Indian on the trail below.

Now, with his Spencer rifle fully charged, the brave little scout took the trail again, and eagerly advanced.

Suddenly he paused, and snuffed in the air.

"I smell smoke!" he muttered. "There is a camp-fire close at hand."

CHAPTER XVI.

RING-DOVE NOTES.

The moment that he smelled the smoke, Dave Estes left the trail that he had thus far followed. He knew he must be near some of the parties who had made it. Springing lightly over a low clump of bushes on one side, he crouched down and listened.

At first he heard no sounds, but soon he heard a trampling of hoofs and other noises which satisfied him that he was near a corral, or close to where horses were feeding.

With his rifle at a trail, his form bent down, he crept cautiously on. He had not gone a hundred yards before he found a little plain of grass, taller and finer than the buffalo grass on the plains, and feeding in it, without any visible guard, about thirty fine ponies—better stock than he had ever seen used by the Northern Indians.

While he gazed at them, and thought how easily he could stampede the gang, he heard something like the sound of an ax farther on.

As the grassy spot was surrounded by a dense forest, he could not see beyond it, but he concluded to creep around to the left of the grass without disturbing the animals, and see what he could discover.

It took him some time to get around, for the forest was dense and full of underbrush, and he had to exercise extreme caution lest he should startle the animals, and thus alarm the owners.

Once around, he passed through the thicket, until he became convinced by the sounds that he was close upon an

encampment, but that it was densely shrouded in the thicket.

Concealing his rifle carefully near the base of a thick branched tree under some loose brush and leaves, he ascended the tree with excessive care, for he knew how perilous it would be if caught there by any stray warrior.

He had only ascended about half way when he was rewarded for all his care and trouble. He looked down directly into a small stockade, capable of holding perhaps about a hundred men at close quarters.

It was built white man fashion, with posts set close together in the ground, and a narrow gateway through which but one could enter at a time. A few loop holes commanded the trail which led to it, but the whole structure was exposed to a fire from such a position as Dave had gained, and it is a position often taken by hostile Indians in an attack.

It seemed as if those who built it intended it more as a protection against sudden surprise than anything like a siege-shelter.

Dave now discovered the cause of the noise which he had heard. Some Indian warriors of whom there were fifteen or twenty inside the stockade, were building a little shed, or shelter, in the corner, evidently for the use of one on whom Dave's eyes rested with eager anxiety.

That one was Dove-Eye, who, seated on a pile of buffalo robes, seemed to take her position quite coolly, while she watched the braves at work.

"She hasn't been abused—that is one comfort," said Dave, as he looked at her calm, quiet face. "But she mustn't stay there to risk it."

He now looked at all the surroundings, and began to plan out future work.

He saw that the Indians were building a regular little room or cabin in one corner of the inclosure, and he had no doubt that when it was finished she would be isolated from the Indians so that they would not see her when she slept.

Dave looked at the pickets in that corner. They were as thick as his thigh, and it would be impossible to cut through them without making a noise.

But where the soil was thrown up the young scout could see that it was of a loose, sandy nature. He might at night dig under it with his knife and hands, and thus approach her, if she could only be made aware of his presence and intentions.

How could he effect this? Dave was good in imitations. Now, too, he had a chance to show it.

He was screened among the leaves and with a thick background, so he felt quite secure there perched up in the branches, within actual pistol-shot of the Comanches and their captive. He was so near that the scent of some buffalo meat roasting before the fire affected him most unpleasantly. For Dave was hungry. But to attract her notice must be his first thought.

He commenced to chirp like a wren, then to give the long, plaintive note of the cat bird. These were too common. Neither the Indians nor their captive paid the least attention.

"Caw! caw! caw!"

He now gave a first-rate imitation of the black crow.

The Indians looked up uneasily at the clouds, and hurried their work.

"The cusses think it is going to rain! I'd give a finger if it would!" muttered Dave, almost despairing of attracting

the notice of Dove-Eye, for she never raised her head.

Dave now tried the coo of the ring-dove.

Why had he not thought of that before?

Dove-Eye started at the sound, listened attentively, and then looked up into the trees. The bird was her favorite.

Dave watched the Indians closely as he repeated the cry, and when he saw that none of them looked up from their work, he repeated it, and gently shook a branch which extended toward the stockade.

Dove-Eye saw the branch move, and her eyes became at once riveted on the tree.

Now Dave crept farther along, until he was sure she could see his face and form, and he took the red bandana, which he had worn loose about his neck, and held it up.

Her form was motionless—there was not a change in her countenance—but the fixed, glad look in the eyes of the girl told him that he was seen, was recognized.

Quickly he bent his head down on the palm of his hand, then put his hand over his eyes, signifying as well as he could that when it was time to sleep he would help her.

She answered by bending her head forward into the palms of her hands as if asleep; then raising her eyes, she made a quick motion toward the corner where the Indians were just finishing her shelter.

Dave nodded, and then made an undulating motion with one hand to signify that after all were asleep they would go, and then he drew back to watch and wait.

He now looked around him at every point, so as to familiarize himself with every bit of ground over which he must pass in approaching the stockade, and in getting away from it, if he succeeded in releasing Dove-Eye. He sought to familiarize himself with the course which led back to where their horses were kept, for he knew that he must stampede their stock or he never could escape pursuit should he release Dove-Eye. There are no better trailers in the world than the Comanches.

Dove-Eye, calm and stoical, gave no sign to put her guards on the alert, and Dave looked on her with double interest.

"She is a neck and a half ahead of any squaw alive," he muttered, "and there isn't a white gal livin' could take this discovery as cool as she does. She is a picture—she is!"

The Indians had now roofed over the little cabin with a tanned buffalo hide, another was fixed round it as a curtain, leaving the occupants to lift a corner when wishing to enter or leave it.

The head brave now examined the work, and by his looks seemed to approve of it, and then at his direction one of the others laid a thick pile of robes, fur-side upon the ground, for a couch.

When this was done, the leader approached Dove-Eye, and by signs gave her to understand that she was to lodge there, thus proving to Dave that she did not understand their language.

Dove-Eye pointed to the meat, roasting by the fire, and to her mouth, then reclined her head upon her hand and closed her eyes.

She would eat her supper and then go into the lodge to sleep.

The Comanches assented, and one of them cut several slices of the roast meat from the huge piece before the fire, and gave it to her on a piece of bark.

Dove-Eye reached out her hand for his knife to use in cutting it, and the brave handed it to her without

hesitation.

Dave watched her as she ate slowly, and saw her drink water from a calabash that a Comanche laid beside her. And he saw that she did not give the brave his knife again, but in a kind of forgetful way she slipped it into the sash at her waist.

"Sharp—sharp as a new jackknife in everything!" muttered Dave, full of admiration. "I'll have her out of that before I'm three hours older!"

Night was not far off, and now Dave got cautiously down from the tree, so as to regain his rifle and get to the vicinity of her corner of the stockade, while he could see.

He could hear the Indians as some went out to look after the ponies, go and return, and then when twilight set in, he could see them increase the fire inside, for now with safety he could get near enough to look through the cracks or chinks between the upright posts.

He crept close to the corner where Dove-Eye lay in her cabin, and gave out the quick, sharp chirp of the cricket.

It was answered in a moment. His heart beat fast. He was now within an arm's length of the Indian maiden, and only the pickets kept them apart.

He dared not speak, or even whisper, for the Indians were awake, sitting around the fire, not fifteen feet distant, and any suspicious sound would put them on the watch.

But, with excessive caution, he began to dig a tunnel under the pickets. To prevent their falling if he undermined them, was a point, he knew, not to be neglected. And it was a difficult thing to so fasten them as not to have the act or the fastenings seen by the Comanches.

He had, as almost every hunter has, a number of strong buckskin thongs in his hunting pouch, which are used to fasten game to the saddle, or bind up bundles of skins or furs.

Carefully he managed to pass several of these from post to post and around them, and thus to give sufficient support to keep them in place.

This done, and no alarm yet given, the brave little scout commenced digging. And soon, when he paused to listen, he became satisfied that Dove-Eye was doing the same thing from the inside.

It was now getting late, and several of the Indians lay down with their feet to the fire to sleep. But Dave saw, to his great uneasiness, that a guard was set to keep awake, and that several times he approached the little lodge where Dove-Eye lay, to listen.

Dove-Eye seemed to be fully aware of this, for at such times she snored like a low-pressure steamboat, much to the amusement of the scout, though he feared her absence would be the more quickly discovered from this when he got her out, as he soon hoped to do.

He worked away manfully, and had got a cavity under two of the posts dug, till he could feel the bottom of each, and he expected soon to have it large enough, when a new annoyance, if, indeed, it did not become a peril, approached.

CHAPTER XVII.

CINDAH ACTS AS COOK.

Buffalo Bill, having left a good supply of grass before Powder Face, cautioned Captain Boyd to remain quiet in the hiding-place. There was no need to caution Cindah,

for she was bound in her infatuation to remain where the "Dream Spirit" was.

The scout now went out into and down the stream a short distance, until he reached a place where, aided by out bent trees and bushes, he could clamber to the top of the cliff.

Once there, he hurried forward to a point from which he could look down on the plains and into the valley.

He saw, as far as his eye could reach, scattered parties of Indians, apparently in search of their fugitives.

Some of these were well up toward the hills, but they had not reached the right trail—that was evident.

What seemed singular to him was that there seemed to be a great accession in the numbers of the Indians, as if all the Black-Foot in the nation were coming to answer the signals of Yellow Bear.

But suddenly this was accounted for. He saw the scattered parties in the east riding westward with great rapidity—he saw, by wreaths of smoke here and there in the distance, that they were not all Black-Foot that were in sight—that the Sioux, most likely, had come to answer the signal smokes of Spotted-Tail.

For a moment he longed to be down where he could see or join in the melee, but on second thought, he muttered:

"It is only dog eat dog—let them fight it out!"

But with his glass he swept the eastern vista far and near, hoping to recognize Dave Estes, or see some sign of the troops, though he should know it was too soon to expect them.

He kept his post for some time, and then, feeling as if he could relish a square meal, the scout made up his mind to have it.

Game was in sight at a dozen points in the vicinity, and he did not think any Indians were near enough to hear a pistol-shot, especially as war parties seemed to be fighting in squads below.

So he descended from a peak of rocks which he had used as a lookout, and crept down against the wind into a ravine where he had seen a herd of elk feeding.

The animals were still there, and with such skill as only the practiced hunter possesses, Buffalo Bill crept from rock to rock until he was in short pistol-shot of the nearest—a fine, fat yearling.

To raise, fire, and send a death-shot through the heart of the animal, was the work of a few seconds only.

The pistol made but little noise, and the herd hardly noticed the fall of the slain animal until the hunter approached to secure his meat. Then they trotted off at an easy gait, showing that they had not been troubled by hunters.

Our hunter, having cut such meat as he could carry easily, from the choicest part of the animal, returned toward the hiding-place where his horse and Boyd kept company with the Sunflower.

Near the edge of the cliff Buffalo Bill gathered a bundle of dry sticks with which to make a fire, and then he descended to the place where he had left those just spoken of.

He found them seated, in earnest conversation, for Boyd was trying to interest Cindah by describing to her the ways and customs of civilized people in the great world of which she had known nothing; the ways of people of her own color, of whom she had only heard through the captive whom Yellow Bear had slain when he fell in love with his beautiful pupil. Cindah was not speaking, but with her great, earnest eyes gazing into the face of the young captain, she was listening to his voice as if it were music

to her soul.

"All comfortable here?" asked the scout, as he entered the cave, threw down his bundle of wood, and unfastened the meat from the strap which held it behind his back.

"Yes, thank you. Have you any news from our anxious friends in the valley?" replied Boyd.

"Nothing that can serve us just now. They seem pretty busy there at present. I will take another look at them by and by. At present, if your appetites equal mine, I have something better to do. I propose to have some breakfast."

And he commenced his preparation by kindling a fire on the stone floor of their temporary dwelling, in one corner, out of the way, where there was also a draught for the little smoke he made.

"Cindah knows how to cook, she will prepare the meat," said the lovely girl, as Buffalo Bill started the fuel into a blaze.

"Thank you, my good girl," said the scout, kindly. "If you would rather do it than not, you may, though I'm handy about the fire myself."

Cindah took the forked sticks which the hunter had thoughtfully provided, and soon had the meat in position, and then, while Buffalo Bill was relating to Captain Boyd his belief that the Sioux had come in contact with the Black-Foot below, she stood and listened.

Reared from her infancy in the lodge of a great war chief, used to hearing stories of battles, she felt a far greater interest in the story that there was a battle going on in the valley than would one of her race raised as they usually are.

Thus she stood listening, when the sound of a stone dropping from the ledge at the mouth of the cave drew her quick eye in that direction. At the same instant, hearing the same sound, Buffalo Bill darted a glance where she did.

And his hand flew to his pistol-belt, for there stood an armed Indian warrior, almost within a spear's length.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

When it was discovered that the prisoner, the young pale-face, had escaped, though he had lain bound hand and foot close to the shelter of branches made for Yellow Bear and his family, there was a tremendous excitement in the camp of the Black-Foot.

The alarm was given loudly, and parties of braves were sent in every direction.

The discovery was made by the sentinel, who had been directed to patrol the camp, which was also guarded by mounted braves, who, acting as videttes, rode in a large circle outside the grazing ground of the stock.

He had seen two prisoners, Spotted-Tail and the young pale-face, lying side by side asleep, and had gone down to the river to get a drink.

He returned; the pale face still lay there, as he thought, but he had drawn his blanket over his head, perhaps to shield it from the mosquitoes.

He passed on from point to point in his beat, and re-passed the place where the prisoners lay several times. The eyes of Spotted Tail were wide open, but he said nothing, and the sentinel had no idea that the pale-face was gone.

When he again came back, Spotted-Tail had rolled over on his face, and he now lay very close to the other.

Thinking there might be some collusion between the two, the sentinel lifted the blanket which he supposed covered the body of the pale-face prisoner.

That body was gone! The yell of surprise which broke from the sentinel's lips was the first note of alarm.

Soon that alarm spread on every hand.

Yellow Bear, excited to frenzy by the escape of one whom he intended to torture, drove his hatchet into the brain of the luckless sentinel without waiting to ask how the escape occurred.

A moment later, the voice of a young brave was heard, shouting:

"Cindah the Sunflower slept near Wanda the Queen! She is not there now! Where has she gone?"

It was Red Plume who spoke.

Then he remembered that the fair girl had said the pale-face should not die—that he was the bright spirit of her dreams, and in an instant he comprehended how the bonds of the pale-face had been severed, how he had been so cunningly taken out from under the eye of the sentinel.

"Cindah the Sunflower? Cannot she be found?" shouted Yellow Bear.

Warriors shouted her name on every side, but there was no answer.

"She has gone with the pale-face," said Wanda, bitterly.

"She has turned on the hand that fed her. Like all of the bad blood, she has been a she-wolf to steal away from those who raised her! When they are taken, let her burn by his side!"

Yellow Bear did not speak. He bowed his head in grief.

For he loved the girl as if she were his own child. He had ever called her so.

"Let not a brave rest till she is found!" he said. "But let not a hair of her head be harmed. Yellow Bear has spoken."

"Yellow Bear is growing old," said Wanda, bitterly. "Old and foolish. He lets his heart speak before his head takes thought. He is a child."

The child did not speak, but he stood and gazed at Spotted-Tail, who sat upon the ground and looked at him.

"The Sioux saw the young pale-face go off," said Yellow Bear.

Spotted-Tail nodded assent.

"Did he go alone?" asked Yellow Bear.

Spotted-Tail made no answer, and the Black-Foot chief again asked the question.

"How, or when he went is his business," said Spotted-Tail, firmly. "I have no tales to tell. Yellow Bear must look to his guards, and not to Spotted-Tail, for the story."

Yellow Bear for an instant placed his hand on his hatchet, and he felt like ending the days of the chief then and there. If he did so, he would not have the joy of seeing him tortured.

So he tured away and asked for Red Plume.

No one could tell where he was now. He had gone with the rest to look for Cindah and the fugitive pale-face.

Wanda, in her bitterness, said:

"All this has come, because Yellow Bear was not content with his own squaws, but must listen to dreams, like a fool!"

"Woman! Yellow Bear will not let even you call him a fool!" said the chief, angrily. "You will eat your words or lose your tongue!"

"May not a woman speak the truth?" asked the haughty squaw.

"Wanda has spoken a lie! The Great Spirit comes and whispers in dreams, and he is not a fool who opens his ear to them. Lie down and be still. Yellow Bear does not want to quarrel with Wanda. He does not wish to forget she is his wife."

"He did, or he would not be here," said Wanda, bound, woman-like, to have the last word.

Yellow Bear made no reply, but turned away to see in person to the security of Young Beaver and the other captives. Having found them safe he came back to his own camp-fire, folded his blanket about his form, and sat down. Thus he remained until day dawned, when he sent all his braves and warriors, except a guard, of a score or less, to seek far and near for the fugitives. If the trail was found, it was to be followed until they were captured.

But especial care was to be taken to secure and bring them both back uninjured.

CHAPTER XIX.

DISCOVERED.

Dave heard the sounds of something approaching stealthily in the bushes. He was startled, brave as he was, for at first he thought surely it was the tread of men walking lightly and carefully.

Could it be other Indians coming to surprise these? Or had he been overheard or discovered, and were the Comanches creeping up in his rear to surprise him?

He rose from the work so near completed, and, knife in hand, stood on guard. He heard the steps coming nearer, and he knew there was more than one making them now.

He glanced through the pickets, and saw that the Comanche sentinel had heard the noise, for he, too, stood in a listening attitude.

Nearer and nearer came the noise, and now Dave knew that it was made by animals.

"The smell of that meat has drawn 'em," he murmured.

A growl, low and snappish, told him that the large gray wolf of the prairie was his visitor. Answering growls also told him that a gang of them was at hand. He had no fear that they would attack him unless they were fearfully hungry, which, at that time of year, in a country full of game, was not likely to be. But they were an annoyance, to say the least.

They came growling and snuffing about until they almost rubbed against his body. He dared not make any noise to drive them away, for that would at once discover his presence to those inside the stockade. Neither did he dare to bend down and continue his work.

One of the animals having come within reach of his arm, received a severe prod from his knife, one so deep that the blood gushed out in a torrent.

True to their wolf nature, the other wolves instantly sprang on the wounded animal, and, amid horrible growls and snarls, tore it to pieces, and went to devouring it.

The noise woke every Indian, and as Dave peered through the chinks in the posts, he saw them stand and consult. They evidently feared a stampede among their horses, and were about to come out to attack the wolves.

To rush back through the pack of wolves, and get speedily into the thickest of the brush, was the work of a few seconds only, and not a second too soon; for the Indians, with burning fire-brands in their hands, rushed out of the stockade, and while some sent a shower of arrows after

the gang of wolves, others threw the fire-brands at them. Had Dave remained near the stockade, he would have inevitably been discovered.

The wolves fled in terror from the spot, and then the Indians after seeing that their ponies were not disturbed, returned to the stockade.

When all was still, Dave crept back. The warriors were crouched about the fire, talking in low tones. One of them went to the little lodge where Dove-Eye lay and looked in.

The young girl was there, and she had so covered the signs of her work with her robes, that the warrior saw nothing to excite his suspicion.

So he went back to the fire.

Again Dave chirped like a cricket, and began to work.

For a great deal of time had been lost during this interruption.

He had not worked over four or five minutes before dirt from her side of the excavation fell on his hands. Ten minutes later he touched her hand with his. Then for the first time he ventured a whisper.

"Keep still, while I dig, lest I hurt you with my knife," he said,

She did not answer, but she ceased work.

It was well she did. The Comanches seemed uneasy. Again the head brave came and looked at her. She was wrapped up in her robes in time, and he went back to his comrades satisfied that all was right.

Dave now worked like a beaver, and in a little while had a hole so large that he could get in and raise his head inside the lodge. He was small, but he knew that she was not so large as he. So she could pass.

"Come," he whispered, "come."

He drew back to the outside of the tunnel, and in a second after she was by his side. She had the knife of the Comanche brave in her hand—the same with which she had cut her meat at supper.

And what pleased Dave just then, even more, she had a large piece of meat in the other hand, which she gave him.

He had fasted since the night before, and was faint with hunger. But he had no time or inclination to eat until at a greater distance from those Comanche braves.

He whispered, "Follow in my trail, and be still as death."

She pressed his hand for a reply, and he crept away.

When they were at the edge of the little prairie, Dave halted to consult with her and to decide whether it was best to stampede their horses, or to try and get away without noise, and on his horse get such a long start that they might not be overtaken.

Half of the night was yet before them. A few whispered words and the latter plan was decided upon.

So Dave, followed by Dove-Eye, crept out to the trail. This he followed to the stream where he had left his own horse.

The faithful animal, well fed and rested, still remained where he had been left.

Dave led him out to the trail, mounted, and bade Dove-Eye take her seat behind him.

Then he took the route for the open plains, whence he would shape a course for the fort to which Buffalo Bill had first directed her.

When he felt free, with his horse headed right, he gave him the rein, and spoke out:

"Dove-Eye has had hard luck!"

"Yes," said the girl. "Did Long-Rifle send you to help me?"

"He let me come. It was my own heart that sent me!"

"The little brave has a good heart. Dove-Eye was a prisoner to Klamat, the Comanche!"

"What, Klamat the Tiger? Was he in the stockade?"

"No—he left me there a prisoner, while he went to find my father. He said he would take him away from Yellow Bear, and then come back to make me his wife. But I would put this knife in my heart first. I love Long-Rifle—I will be his wife."

"Buffalo Bill, or Long-Rifle, as you call him, has a wife already."

"What of that? He is a great hunter, and can feed more wives than I have fingers on both my hands."

"We pale-faces have a law, and one wife is all that law will let us have."

"That is a fool law. Suppose there are a heap more women than there are men. Must all but one go without a husband?"

Dave was puzzled, but he bravely answered:

"Yes, of course!"

"Dove-Eye is not a pale face. She loves Long-Rifle, and if he has one wife, or a dozen, she does not care. She will be the last and best loved."

Dave was not good at argument. No man is, that is in love. And Dave was in love with Dove-Eye. Her arm, girdling his waist as she held to him to steady herself on the horse, was a zone of happiness to him. He almost forgot the danger of pursuit, and was too careless about concealing his trail as he rode on.

Dove-Eye herself was the first to call his attention to this necessity, and it was near the dawn of day when she did so. It, perhaps, occurred to her, because they had reached a good place to do it. They came to the banks of a stream which lead from the peaks toward which they rode.

Into this Dave at once pushed his willing horse, and for some time he rode along in the clear and refreshing water.

They had paused to listen many times before day, but had heard no sound of pursuit so far; but now when day broke, they knew, of course, that the absence of Dove-Eye had been discovered.

"We have every bit of twenty miles start, and that is a big thing!" said Dave, when Dove-Eye suggested that the Comanches would follow their trail.

"Two on one horse will tire him out. Dove-Eye had better walk!" said the girl.

"Nary time. If there is walking to do, I'll go afoot!" said Dave. "My Black Hawk can carry us both and make eighty miles a day."

As they were now where a barren rocky ridge stretched out nearly in the course which they should follow, Dave decided to leave the stream, and did so with great caution, so as to leave as little sign as possible for an enemy to follow.

They rode on a little way to a bit of timber, and now Dave thought it safe to rest for a short time, and to eat some of the meat which Dove-Eye had been so thoughtful to save.

The two dismounted from the tired horse, which at once went to feeding—a prairie horse is never too tired to eat, or a prairie man either, I believe—and then Dove-Eye produced her store.

The roasted buffalo meat, chosen from the tenderest part

of the animal, was both tender and juicy, and Dave, as well as Dove-Eye, speedily began to lessen the bulk.

While they were thus engaged, Dave noticed that his horse stopped feeding and turned his head with ears pointed toward the route over which they had come.

In a second the scout was on his feet. The next moment he was in the saddle, calling to Dove-Eye to mount behind him, for he saw not half a mile off the lances of a band of warriors on his trail.

"Save yourself, Little Brave—the horse will not carry both away!" she cried.

"It will carry both or none!" cried Dave, earnestly.

"Mount with me, or I dismount, and fight it out here!"

"Little Brave has a good heart, but he is a big fool to risk his life for a squaw!" said Dove-Eye.

"I don't think so," said Dave, as Dove-Eye sprang up behind him.

The next second he sped away over the ridge, as fast as his horse could carry the double burden, while the yells of the pursuing warriors told that they had discovered him.

On rode the heroic scout, looking now only for some good place where he could halt, take cover, and fight for his life and that of her he loved.

It seemed as if he never would find such a spot. On leaving the little grove where they had halted, there was not a tree or shrub for a long distance on the barren ridge. But ahead there was a patch of trees, and if he could gain it before his pursuers came up, Dave thought that he could hold them in check while Dove-Eye could escape. For he would rather meet death than see her fall into the hands of the Comanches.

On—he rode, spurring his horse as he never had spurred him before, and for a time he felt that even if he did not gain on his pursuers, they were not gaining on him.

But weight and speed began to tell, and while the shelter ahead was yet a mile off at least, he felt that the noble horse was beginning to weaken and to lose ground.

He did not speak, but he took one of the two revolvers from his belt and placed it in the hand of Dove-Eye.

"If it comes to the worst," he said, in a low tone, "die with that in your hand, and don't have a load left while there is a Comanche before you. I'm good for a dozen if they don't hit me too hard."

Dove-Eye took the weapon and looked back. The Comanches were strung along for half a mile in a line, and only seven or eight were very near.

One was within almost a spear's length, and he had an arrow drawn up in his bow.

CHAPTER XX.

NATOLAH, THE WOMAN WITH A TONGUE.

Dove-Eye knew that life for one or both depended on her and the providence of the Great Spirit. Quick as thought she raised the pistol and fired directly at the face of the Comanche, and he apparently at the same instant drew his arrow to the head and let it go.

The bullet must have been a second the quickest in its fatal mission, for the arrow flew just above the head of the scout, piercing his slouch hat in the crown, while the ball from Dove-Eye's pistol pierced the brain of the Comanche, and he fell forward on his horse so dead that he uttered no outcry; but with the strange tenacity to cling that dying people often show, still clung to his horse with his legs and arms.

The animal sprang forward with terror as he felt the

death pressure, and in an instant was alongside of the other, and Dave, not knowing what Dove-Eye had done, raised his pistol to dispatch the closing enemy, as he thought him to be.

"Don't waste your powder! The Comanche is dead!" said Dove-Eye.

And then she turned to see whether there were more within pistol-shot.

As she did so, Dave caught the rein of the other horse as it flew loose near his hand, jerked the animal in close to his, and pushed the dead Indian from his seat.

This took scarce a second, and with a bound he sat astride the other horse, calling to Dove-Eye to take his saddle on the Black Hawk.

Dove Eye was at that moment better occupied; she was raising her pistol for a long shot at another Comanche.

She fired as she heard Dave speak, and then, as she slipped forward in his place, heard him shout:

"Gal, you knocked spots out of another red cuss! I'm ashamed of myself to let you do all the fightin', while I'm on the run."

He now turned in his saddle, for while he was speaking he was clearing his Spencer rifle from its sling, and, without checking the horse at all, he sent the next Comanche in the line to the happy hunting-grounds.

"Good for the Little Brave!" cried Dove-Eye, now catching the reins of her horse to take him in hand. "We can fight them all."

"But not what are ahead of us," cried Dave, gloomily, and he called to her to hold up. "The woods ahead are full of reds," he added. "We're cut off, and our time has come."

Dove-Eye looked in the direction in which he pointed, and she saw fully a hundred painted warriors within a hundred yards, mounted and ready to charge.

One glance, while Dave Estes, despairing as he did, sent one more Comanche to death, checking the rest, and Dove-Eye cried:

"They are my people! They are Sioux!"

And, waving a scarf, which she tore from her waist, in the air, she shouted out a shrill cry, which in an instant changed the hostile attitude of the Indians, and as they rode forth with weapons lowered, she pointed to the Comanches who had halted at the fall of the fourth of their number.

Instantly a band of at least forty or fifty Sioux warriors darted away after the Comanches, who now turned to fly, and while they dashed on Dove-Eye, bidding the Little Brave ride close to her and fear not, rode on to meet the others.

Among them sat an elderly Indian woman on a fine horse, with handsome trappings.

"My mother," said Dove-Eye, and she rode up to the elderly woman, and, taking her hand, pressed it to her lips.

"Who is this pale-face, and whence come you!" asked the wife of Spotted-Tail, for this was she.

"He is the Little Brave. I was a prisoner in the hands of the Comanches. He got me away. You may thank him that I am here," replied Dove-Eye.

"Where is Spotted Tail, thy father?"

"In the hands of the Black-Foot. I was on my way to the great fort of the pale-faces to get soldiers to help Long-Rifle to take him away. Long-Rifle has staid to watch him and to save him."

"Are there not enough Sioux to fight the Black-Foot and

to save their chief?" asked the wife of Spotted-Tail, haughtily. "Must we ask the pale-faces to help us? Signals were seen two suns ago in the west, and I sent all the warriors who were in from the hunt to answer them. Then I went to find more, and they are here."

"Long-Rifle knows better than we do, and he bade me go to the fort of the pale-faces. The Black-Foot are many, and they fight strong," said Dove-Eye. "Let my mother go on with the braves if she will—Dove-Eye will do as she promised Long-Rifle she would—she will go for the pale-face soldiers."

"Where is Long Rifle?"

"He is watching to save Spotted-Tail, my father. He sent the Little Brave to save and help me."

The wife of Spotted-Tail called two of the sub-chiefs to her side and held a consultation. Then she asked:

"Has Spotted-Tail promised anything that Long-Rifle has agreed to help him?"

"Yes. He has said the Sioux should keep peace with the pale-faces."

"He is a fool! The pale-faces will come and kill all the buffalo. They are many, and they will cover all his hunting-grounds. His people will starve. The Sioux will not make peace with the pale-faces. Neither shall their chief take help from their soldiers. I, Natolah, the Woman with a Tongue, have said it!"

"Ah, look there!" cried Dave Estes, who had been intently watching to see the Sioux and the Comanches meet in battle. "Those who followed us have been joined by more, and now with your own people they ride this way. What does it mean?"

"I do not know. It is strange," said Dove-Eye.

Then, as a warrior rode ahead of the rest, coming rapidly on, she cried:

"It is my father—he is free! But where is Long-Rifle?"

CHAPTER XXI.

CAPTAIN BOYD MAKES A FRIEND OF RED PLUME.

When Buffalo Bill saw the dark, fiendish-looking face of that warrior in the mouth of the cave, he believed him to be only the leader of a band, for he had no thought one would dare to face two armed men, and he raised his pistol to end his career.

But, with the speed of thought, Cindah caught his arm.

"Do not fire!" she cried. "It is Red Plume, my friend and brother?"

"Let him shoot! Red Plume does not want to live any longer!" said the young Indian, coming forward and throwing bow and spear on the ground. "He has followed Cindah the Sunflower to see her with the people she has chosen as her friends—the people of her own color—to ask her if she is here of her own free choice?"

"Cindah is here because she wanted to come. She could not see the brave, the beautiful Dream Spirit die at the torture-post to which Yellow Bear had sworn to bind him."

Cindah pointed to Captain Boyd as she spoke.

Red Plume looked also at the young pale-face, and then turning to Cindah, asked, in a low, earnest tone:

"Has the Sunflower given her heart to this pale-face, whom she calls the Dream Spirit?"

"Yes, I love him. He is my life!" said Cindah, passionately.

"Then it is time for Red Plume to die!" said the young warrior; and he drew his knife from its scabbard and

raised it with the evident intention to plunge it in his breast.

Captain Boyd caught his arm and snatched away the weapon.

"Red Plume," he said, "you love the Sunflower. I will not, cannot stand in your way. Come and listen to a word from me that may make your mind easy."

"The mind of Red Plume will be easy when he sleeps his last sleep," said the Indian, sullenly.

But Captain Boyd drew him aside and whispered some words in the ear of the Indian which seemed to have a strange effect upon him.

He drew back, looked earnestly in the face of the young captain, then actually laughing—a strange thing for an Indian to do—he took both of the captain's hands in his, and said:

"Pale-face brother, we will be good friends. Red Plume will no longer grieve because the Sunflower loves you."

Buffalo Bill and Cindah were astonished at this sudden change, and the scout rather doubted its honesty; but it was better than he expected.

"Will Red Plume now say if he came alone, or are there others of his tribe on our trail?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Red Plume came alone. No eye but his found the trail of Cindah and the pale-faces. He would let none see where he went when he found it, for he lay down and crawled like a snake. Now Red Plume will stay with Cindah and her friends, and help them. He does not want to go back to Yellow Bear. The great chief is mad and he will kill Red Plume if he sees him."

"Is Spotted-Tail yet safe?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"He is bound with many thongs. He will be watched till the death song is sung."

"It must not be sung for him," said the scout. "I have promised to save him, and I must. The word of Long-Rifle has never been broken to white man or red."

"What is the Indian's life to you?" asked Captain Boyd, impatiently.

"As a mere life—nothing. But as a pledged safe-guard of my word, everything. I had an object when I made him a promise and extracted one from him. I had found a country rich beyond all I have ever seen, in gold in game, in vegetation. I wished to have free access to it for myself and my friends. A year of labor here in the mines I have seen would leave me and mine independent for life. For this I saved the daughter of Spotted-Tail when Yellow Bear was bearing her away. For this, Spotted-Tail promising peace for his people with ours, I promised to see him back in safety to his people. And, with Heaven's help, I will do it."

"How can we get away—let alone helping him!" asked Boyd.

"I don't know yet, but all will come right. I've been in some hard scrapes before, but I got through all safe in the end," said Buffalo Bill, quietly. "When night comes on I shall make a scout down toward the camp. I may see some way to get the old chief out of the clutches of his enemy."

"Red Plume will go and help you," said the Indian.

"What, and leave the Sunflower here with the handsome pale-face?" asked Buffalo Bill, rather surprised at this volunteer service.

"Yes. Red Plume knows that the Sunflower is safe. He is no longer a fool. He will not be jealous of the Dream Spirit."

Cindah smiled, and said:

"Red Plume is wise. He shall be my good brother, as he has always been. And the beautiful Dream Spirit shall be my husband."

Again Red Plume laughed. And this time Captain Boyd laughed also. Buffalo Bill, and perhaps Cindah, also, wondered what they found to laugh at.

"We will go out from the wilderness into the great world that he has told me of, where there are wigwams as high as mountains, and villages in which one will tire out while walking, and yet not leave their bounds. We will see all that is beautiful, and if that world is better than this, we will stay there. If not, we will come back and live here till the Master of Life calls us away!" said Cindah.

"What a lovely dreamer she is," said Boyd, in a low tone.

"We may as well think of something more necessary than dreams," said Buffalo Bill. "The elk steaks are rather overdone now, and I am hungry."

The remarks of the scout were appreciated, for all of the party at once went to eating.

While they are thus engaged, we must peep over the hill, where there is some busy work going on.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LITTLE SCOUT'S BLOW.

When Yellow Bear had sent away nearly all his warriors in search of the fugitives, and Wanda had sunk sulkily down to rest on the couch of robes from which she had risen, the old chief called a medicine man to dress his broken arm, for in his excitement he had slipped some of the bandages.

The medicine man was not skillful, or else he had been made nervous by the angry mood which Yellow Bear was in, and let the broken bones come apart so that the grating sound as he straightened them reached the ear of Spotted-Tail.

The Sioux chief saw the color leave the cheek of Yellow Bear, while a groan broke from his lips. And it seemed to give him unspeakable delight.

"Ugh!" he said, in a tone of exultation. "Yellow Bear groans. Is he sick because he has not got Dove Eye, my daughter, to comfort him?"

"Dog! Yellow Bear groans because the time goes so slow. He wants to get all his people together, so that they may see what a coward squaw Yellow Bear has found; that they may hear Spotted-Tail cry out when the red fire licks up his black blood."

"The Black-Foot has not been born who will hear Spotted-Tail complain. He is now in more pain than Yellow Bear yet he does not turn pale or whine like a sick wolf, as Yellow Bear does."

"Wait—wait! We will see!" said Yellow Bear, who did not wince again while his arm was being put in splinters.

This done, he was about to return to his temporary lodge, when he saw a band of horsemen—mounted warriors—come sweeping with wonderful speed over the plains, in the direction of his camp. He saw at a glance that they were strange warriors, and he sprang upon his own war steed, which stood saddled close at hand, and dashed wildly away.

The next minute this band, headed by a noble-looking warrior, swooping on like a bevy of eagles from the clouds drew rein where Spotted-Tail, and his fellow-prisoners were seated, for all had raised up to look on the warriors,

whom they knew to be of a strange tribe.

"Where is Spotted-Tail, the father of Dove-Eye, the Red Rose of the Prairies?" asked the leader of these strangers, a warrior who bore a lance trimmed with the scalps which he had taken, from the butt to the point.

"I am Spotted-Tail," said the Sioux chief, gloomily.

The stranger spoke to his followers, and one led up a powerful horse: and the strange chief said:

"I, Klamat, the Tiger of the Comanches, told Dove-Eye I would set her father free. Behold, it is done!"

And, dismounting, he cut the thongs which bound the limbs of the chief, while at a sign from him two other warriors lifted Spotted-Tail upon the led horse.

"Away!" cried the Comanche.

And before the astonished chief could ask a question, or even set Young Beaver free, the Comanches swept off at fearful speed.

Spotted-Tail saw, as they sped on, what seemed to be bands of his own people engaged in battle with scattered squads of Black-Foot; but to his repeated questions, and to his request to halt, the Comanche was deaf.

He would only say:

"Klamat has said to Dove-Eye she shall see her father. He will keep his word!"

Away over the prairie he rode, Spotted Tail in the center of the band, and soon Wind River Gap was left far, far behind.

Spotted Tail knew not whether to rejoice at this freedom or not. The Sioux and the Comanches, or Lipans, had not been friends for many years, though their hunting-grounds were so far apart that they seldom met. If Klamat held him as a prisoner, he might live longer than he would have lived in the hands of Yellow Bear; but would he be permitted to go back to his tribe?

Too proud to ask, where an answer seemed to be denied, the chief rode on for hours; and then the party came suddenly in sight of a single Comanche, riding like a cloud driven before the gale.

This warrior, when he met Klamat, spoke to him in his own tongue, which Spotted-Tail did not understand.

The eyes of Klamat seemed to blaze with fury when he heard what this warrior said. He paused but a moment, then the course of the party was changed more to the north and east, and they rode forward more swiftly than ever.

They came to a stream, where there was a fresh trail of horses. Here Klamat halted only long enough to let his horses drink, and then he set off across the country, not on the trail, but still in an easterly course.

His speed, his looks and actions told Spotted Tail that he was after some enemy who was in that direction, but the Comanche did not pause to enlighten him on any point.

He looked dark, gloomy, ferocious, indeed, like the tiger that Indian fame proclaimed that he was.

Thus hours passed, and Spotted-Tail wondered at the endurance of the Southern horses, which still carried them on; for in the Sioux nation, or among the Pawnees, they had no horses which could run so long at full speed and not give out.

At last, when Spotted-Tail himself was well-nigh worn out, and felt himself growing weak, the Comanche slackened his rein.

Ahead they saw another band, the warriors carrying lances, like themselves.

They had just come to a halt, for beyond them still was

a forest, and in the verge of it there appeared to be many mounted Indians.

Klamat did not check his speed—he did not halt; but when he saw a large band of Indians coming at a charge from the forest, he turned to Spotted Tail and said:

"These are braves of your tribe charging down on warriors of mine. I have saved the life of Spotted-Tail. Let there be peace between our tribes."

Spotted-Tail knew that there was no time to hesitate.

"It shall be peace!" he cried.

And unrestrained—for Indian honor, once given, is honor—he rode forward to check the charging braves.

And he did it just in time, for, confident in numbers, seeing only the few who had followed Dave Estes and Dove-Eye so close, they would in a minute more have been in deadly conflict.

"Who heads the Sioux to-day?" asked Spotted-Tail of the sub-chief who led the charge, as he lowered his spear, while Klamat and his warriors, with spear-heads reversed, joined the chief of the Sioux.

"Natolah, the wife of Spotted-Tail, the mother of Dove-Eye," replied the sub-chief.

"Where is Dove-Eye?" eagerly asked Klamat.

The sub-chief did not reply to him, but looked at Spotted-Tail, and said:

"When Spotted Tail is speaking no one else must question a Sioux."

"Answer him. Where is Dove-Eye, my child?" said Spotted-Tail.

"With her mother. She has just come in with a pale-face brave," replied the sub-chief.

"Let us ride on. I would look upon Dove-Eye," said the Comanche. "Yesterday she was my prisoner. I told her I would take her father from the hands of his enemy, and then I would make her my wife."

Spotted-Tail made no answer, but he rode on side by side with Klamat, each followed by his own warriors, until they were in the edge of the forest, where Natolah, the Woman with a Tongue, waited for her chief and husband.

"Where is Dove-Eye?" was the first question which left the lips of Spotted-Tail, as he approached his wife.

"Here!" said the beautiful girl, who had drawn back out of observation, for she could not understand why the Comanches were coming in this friendly guise when her own hand had just sent two to hunt in the valley of death.

And she stepped forward and laid her small hands upon the mane of the horse which her father rode.

"Who is the pale-face that is with Dove-Eye?" continued the chief.

"The Little Brave, the friend of Long-Rifle, who saved me from the claws of Yellow Bear, who waited to watch over you till I could get the tribe called to help you and call up the pale-face braves to help you drive the Black-Foot from your hunting-grounds."

"The Little Brave is welcome in the tribe of Spotted Tail. He is a great warrior. He is not afraid of fire," said Spotted-Tail.

"Who killed the Comanches that followed Dove-Eye?" now asked Klamat, who had just been spoken to by one of his braves.

"I killed two and the Little Brave killed two. We would have killed them all had they followed us long enough and none of my tribe been in the way," said Dove-Eye, proudly.

Klamat seemed for an instant to struggle with an anger—

spirit in his breast. Then conquering it, he said, as admiration of her courage shone in his eye:

"Dove-Eye is fit to be the wife of a great warrior. Klamat, now at peace with her people—Klamat, who owns more horses than she can count, asks Spotted-Tail to give him Dove-Eye for a wife."

"What has Dove-Eye to say?" asked the Sioux chieftain, looking anxiously on his child.

"That if Klamat owned all the horses on the plains she would not be his wife. Let him take a wife from among his own people," said the beautiful, heroic girl.

Klamat's eyes flashed as he said:

"Does Dove-Eye love the pale-face dog who stole her from his fort?"

The Comanche had no time to listen to the answer of Dove-Eye, if she had one to make, for Dave Estes, quick to anger and quick to act, struck him a stunning blow with his clenched fist fair in the face, and as he fell forward stunned to the earth, cried out:

"No red cuss shall call me a dog and not feel my bite!"

The Comanches started in a body, with leveled spears to revenge the insult to their chief, while Spotted-Tail shouted:

"No brave shall raise a hand, or it is war between the tribes. The Little Brave was insulted, and he knew how to take his own part."

"Spotted-Tail is right. The tribes have nothing to do with this quarrel," said Klamat himself, rising from the ground. "But," he added, turning fiercely on the young scout, "there is war between us. One of us must die!"

"I'm agreed on that, and the one who dies will not be me," said the scout, coolly.

"Let Spotted-Tail say how we shall fight, and then let it be war and not words," said the Comanche.

"I am convenient, so pitch ahead with your pepper-gram," cried the undaunted little hero.

"You would fight as warriors fight and before all the braves?" asked Spotted-Tail.

"Yes, and before Dove-Eye," said Klamat, eagerly. "For her Klamat would fight a thousand braves!"

"Let two fresh horses be brought," said Spotted-Tail. "Then let the two, Klamat the Tiger and the Little Brave lay away all weapons but one—the knife which each wears in his belt. Let them ride apart the distance an arrow can fly, and then come together as they will. Spotted-Tail has spoken. Do both agree?"

"No," said the scout. "I want no fresh horse. My horse knows me, and he is not too tired to carry his master in a fight."

"And I will ride the horse which has carried me for two days," said the Comanche. "Klamat asks no advantage over the pale-face. He will take his scalp without that."

"Wait till you get it before you crow, my rooster!" said the scout.

"Both shall wait till the sun is a man's height above the trees. They shall eat and be strong, so as to make a good fight," said Spotted-Tail.

"To that I am content," said Dave, quietly.

And he went to his horse, took the bit from its mouth, and turned it to some grass to feed.

Klamat, whose stern face told how deep his anger burned, bade one of his warriors see to his horse, and then he turned with impatience to wait the time set by Spotted-Tail for the duel to commence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GENERAL CUSTER.

A body of cavalry, not dressed in the neat and faultless uniform which they would wear on parade in a civilized part of the country, but armed as well—ay, even better than they would be there—rode in column over the beautiful, undulating lands which spread about the headwaters of the Big Horn River.

The main body—a full regiment, if not more—rode in a column of fours, with a small advance and rear guard, and a flanking body of men not in uniform, but evidently composed of that class of daring frontiersmen who rejoice to serve with the army as scouts.

These flankers, to the number fifteen or twenty all told, rode scattered on the right and left of the advance.

With this advance, accompanied by a couple of staff officers, rode a young man, with long, fair hair, whose shoulder-straps, star-bearing, proclaimed his rank to be that of a general, and who was evidently in command of the column.

"It is time California Joe was back," said the general to a scout near him. "He said when we made our noon halt that he would ride ahead, look for an old camping-ground that he knew, and rejoin us by the middle of the afternoon."

"California Joe gen'rally keeps his word, Gen'ral Custer," said the scout. "But on the plains as well as elsewhere, there's things happen that will set the best of us back."

"I thought Little Buckshot did not believe in impossibilities," said the general, with a smile.

"I don't in impossibilities, general; but in delays I do. But there comes California Joe, sir, on a lope."

"Yes; he rides fast, instead of waiting for us?" said the general.

"He has seen reds. I'll bet high on that," said one of the officers.

"Column, forward! Trot!" cried General Custer; and he at once put spur to his own horse and went forward at a more rapid gait, followed by his personal staff and accompanied by the scout.

He soon met California Joe, a middle-aged scout, almost too well known in the army to need a description.

Joe was mounted on a genuine mustang, about as red as his own whiskers, and as rough as his own hair, and the broad rim of his old slouch hat blew back from over his honest face, which was red with excitement.

"What is your hurry, Joe?" asked General Custer, as he reined in his horse.

"I'm so dry, gen'ral, I'm afraid I can never git breath to tell you!" cried the old scout and sharpshooter.

The general smiled. He knew California Joe too well to misunderstand him.

"Have you your flask handy?" he said to an officer who sat in his saddle close by.

"Yes, general; and Joe can use enough of its contents to bring back his breath."

Joe took a very long pull at the flask, and then wiping its mouth on the sleeve of his hunting coat, handed it back to the owner, with a word of thanks.

"Gen'ral," said he, "we're goin' to have jest the nicest chance to wipe out a double-handful of red varmints that ever you did see! Oh, it's beautiful! I had a good peep

at the cusses, all in camp, and they never set eyes on hide or hair of me!"

"Indians! How many and where?" asked the general, impatiently.

"Sioux—about a hundred braves, mounted and ready for the war-path—in that timber over there to the nor'west!"

"Mounted you say? Then they are gone before now."

"No, sir; not mounted, but with stock to mount. Oh, they're lovely, gen'ral. I could hardly help ridin' in and poppin' over three or four, jest to keep my hand in!"

"You are sure they didn't see you!"

"Of course I am, or some of 'em would have been after me like wolves after a lame buffalo. They all had their eyes to the west getting ready for a start, I reckon."

"Then ride forward with Little Buckshot and see what they are doing, while I follow with the column."

"Yes, gen'ral. Captain, will you jest let me feel the weight of your flask one minute before I go."

Joe felt the weight of the flask. It was lighter when he handed it back.

He did not wait to hear any comments on that, but dashed on after Little Buckshot, who was riding away at a gallop, while the column struck a sweeping trot.

General Custer now gave orders to his staff to pass the word back to prepare for action, and allowed the column to close up in compact order, while riding still in advance himself he watched the scouts who rode on far ahead.

When near the piece of forest which Joe had pointed out, the general halted the command, let the men dismount to breathe their horses, and waited for the report of the scouts.

He had not long to wait. California Joe and Little Buckshot came riding back even faster than they went. Little Buckshot first in, was the first to report.

He stated that there were nearer two hundred than one hundred Indians—that there were Comanches as well as Sioux, and that there were women among them.

California Joe told the same story, and both scouts joined in the belief that it was a war party, though it seemed singular that they should unite when the Sioux and Comanches had been long known to be on bad terms.

As General Custer had no intention to attack the Indians unless they exhibited hostility, much as California Joe desired to see the varmints all wiped out, he now inquired into the nature of the ground, so that he could so approach them as to have it at his own option to charge them, or if they appeared hostile to await their charge.

"They're all huddled on the farther edge of that narrow strip of timber," said California Joe. "The've got some kind of a talk going on. We can take a bit of a circuit to the right, and throw ourselves directly in their front."

"That is precisely the plan I shall adopt," cried the young general.

The proper orders were given, and with the scouts all with him as his own body-guard, the gallant leader rode on.

Suddenly, after a gallop of a mile, General Custer drew rein, for a strange sight met his eye.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TERRIBLE DUEL ON HORSEBACK.

The sight which caused General Custer to draw rein can better be described if we leave him and go to the spot where the preparations for the terrible duel between Klamat, the Comanche Tiger, and Dave Estes commenced.

For it was the sight of this duel at its commencement which made the general draw rein, and also halt his column.

The sun was a little over an hour high when Spotted-Tail told the two intended combatants to get ready, for it was time.

"Take care of these, gal, and if I should go under in this fight, keep them for my sake!"

That was what Dave said, as he took off his fringed hunting shirt, his bullet pouch and powder horn, and his belt with its pistols and knife scabbard. He gave her his rifle also to hold, and if he fell to keep. The knife which he was about to use—a long, straight-bladed hunting knife—required no scabbard now. But with careful forethought, the little scout took a slender thong of buckskin and attaching it to the buck horn handle of the knife, fastened the same to his wrist.

Now, naked to his waist, the knotted muscles of his white arms showing a tremendous strength for one so slight, his broad shoulders and full chest free from all incumbrance, with his buckskin trousers tight about his slender waist, and loose about his strong lower limbs, the young hero, as he was, a Little Giant, was ready to do successful battle with his brawny and gigantic antagonist.

The moment he had taken off his arms and hunting-shirt, Dave gave a shrill cry, which brought his trained horse, his noble Black Hawk, up to him on a trot.

"Old boy, we've got some lively work before us!" said Dave, patting his horse on the neck. "I may as well lighten you all I can."

He then took off the saddle and the blanket with it, but he took the girth which had bound the saddle to its place and replaced it loosely on the horse. He took off the bridle entirely, for his horse, like Powder Face, knew by the pressure of its rider's leg when and where that rider wished to turn, and by his voice when to go or stop.

"Is the pale-face ready? or would he wait to speak his prayers?" said Klamat, sneeringly, as he sat in savage pride on his horse, which was saddled and bridled as usual.

"I haven't much prayin' to do just now, Mr. Copper-head," said Dave, coolly. "But I hope the Great Spirit will forgive me for sending a savage like you before him in such a hurry."

Then turning to Dove-Eye, Dave took her hand, and said: "Gal, if I don't get another chance to say it—good-by. I love you, and I'm goin' to fight like lightnin' to get that snake out of your way."

"Fight and kill him," said Dove-Eye. "If he kills you, I'll kill him."

"That's the grit," said Dave, as he sprang on his horse. "Now, Mr. Spotted-Tail, just tell us where the bounds are, and I'm ready to sail in."

The Sioux chief pointed to two spears, with red flags on them, set in the ground about two hundred yards in front of the spot where all the Indians were congregated, and nearly the same distance apart.

"The Little Brave will take the one nearest to the sun—the Comanche chief the other, for a post. When Spotted-Tail waves his blanket in the air, then begin the fight. Its end is with yourselves. Are both of you now ready?"

"I am, but Klamat is not," said Dave. "He wears upon his breast a shield—mine is bare."

"It is but the sign of my rank," said the Comanche, as

he laid his hand upon a golden emblem of the sun, as large as the crown of the hat Dave had cast down.

"Bare your breast, coward, as I have done," cried the little scout.

With a look of gloomy hatred, the Comanche lifted the symbol from his breast. It had more meaning than even Dave had suspected, for the chief had taken it as a gift from the hand of an Aztec priest, who told him while he wore that, he would be invulnerable.

He offered it to Dove-Eye to hold for him, as she now held the arms and trappings of his enemy.

With a look of bitter scorn she refused to take it, and he had to consign it to the care of one of his own warriors.

Now, with that off, his pride went too, and he tore off all his proud trappings, and, in a few seconds, his giant form was also bare to the waist.

"Now," he cried, as he waved his long, glittering knife in the air—"now is the pale-face satisfied?"

"Yes. To your post, as I to mine," cried Dave, bounding to the back of his horse and riding to the spear which was set farthest east.

He had just reached it, when he saw, to his surprise, mounted troops close at hand, but he had not a moment's time to inspect them, or even to think what they were, for the Comanche being already at his post, the Sioux chief, who could not see the troops, gave the signal.

With a terrible yell the Comanche dashed forward on a direct line for Dave, while the latter, with his horse at an easy gallop, rode on to meet the terrific charge of the other.

As Dave rode, erect and easy, it seemed as if the Comanche, prone on his horse, with one hand clutching the mane, the other stretched forward with the knife pointed, would have a terrible advantage.

But when the horses were almost breast to breast, the black steed of the scout, touched in the flank by his rider's heels, bounded full a yard to one side, and Dave, clinging with one hand to the girth on his back, reached far over and cut a deep groove in the back of the Comanche, who supposed himself out of reach.

Wildly yelling, the Indian drew rein and turned his horse in swift pursuit of that of Dave, which seemed for an instant to be flying from him.

But, quicker than thought, the black horse, impelled by a touch, wheeled, reared full before the flying steed of the Comanche, which fell back on its haunches, and both horses sat with their fore-feet in the air, furiously striking and biting each other, while the knives of the riders played like vivid lightning in alternate thrust and parry.

So close were men and horses, that the Indians, but a hundred yards away, could not see between them, and had it not been for the stern order of Spotted-Tail to remain still and motionless, they would have rushed up in their excitement to get a closer view of the terrible struggle.

This lasted scarce a minute, yet to all who gazed it seemed much longer. Then all at once, a knife was seen to fly high up in the air, and fall yards away from the combatants.

Dove-Eye trembled now for the first time. One of the combatants was disarmed. If it was the Little Brave, his doom was sealed.

But it was not he. He was seen to touch his horse, which wheeled away from the front of the other, then to take a short circle, waving his own knife high over his head.

Then, bending as he rode, he picked up the knife which he had struck from the hand of the Comanche, and then

checked his horse in its impetuous flight before Klamat, who, bleeding from several wounds, as did his opponent bleed, also stood with folded arms beside the horse, which he had no more use for, waiting for the death-blow.

Dave looked at him as he stood there bleeding, yet fearless, and though he was at his mercy, he could not slay him. Tossing his knife toward the mortified chief, he cried:

"Take better care of your tools, Tiger of the Comanches. Mount and try your luck again."

"Klamat is not a dog, to accept life from a pale-face!" shouted the maddened chief, for he heard the derisive laugh of Dove-Eye. "He has made his life a shame, and he will throw it away."

He snatched the knife from the ground as he said this, and drove it to the heart of his trembling horse.

The animal, with a quiver, fell to the ground, and then all as quickly the haughty chief buried the keen, reeking weapon in his own breast.

He fell upon his horse, and the duel was over.

Spotted-Tail and Dove-Eye rushed forward to greet the Little Brave, and then the Sioux chief saw the cavalry formed on the plains, as he thought, ready to charge.

"Ho! The pale-face warriors from the big forts are upon us!" he cried.

And he would have turned to either lead his band in battle, or fly, if there was a chance; but the little scout cried out:

"They are my friends, and there shall be no fight. I will ride to meet their chief, and you shall see the white flag of peace raised in their front!"

"The Little Brave is right. There shall be peace, because I promised Long-Rifle it should be so!" said Spotted-Tail.

"But he must go to the pale-faces quickly, or they will come to us!"

"I will ride at once, and as I am; but do not let one of your people move, lest the soldiers think they mean to fight, and charge upon them!" cried Dove.

And while Spotted Tail held up his hand to warn the Comanches to keep back, for they were about to ride forward to take up the body of their chief, Dave darted away to meet those whom he at once recognized—General Custer and his officers, and, not least, if last, California Joe and his fellow-scout, Little Buckshot, for all sat upon their horses, apparently wonder-stricken at what they had seen.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE COMANCHE'S THREAT.

Dave Estes was well known by sight, and services as well, to General Custer; but now, half naked, bare-headed, blood streaming from several gashes in his face and arms, it is no wonder that the brave young general did not know him.

"Who are you, and what does the scene mean which we have just witnessed?" cried the general, as Dave halted in front of him and saluted.

"You used to call me Little Dave, the Scout, general," said Estes, "I'm not in parlor rig just now; I've been busy a butcherin'!"

"Dave Estes, the Scout!" cried the general. "What a terrible fight you have had! We saw it all."

"The bulliest fight and the bulliest little cuss that ever drew a knife" shouted California Joe. "Gen'ral, jest let me sail in and lay out another one, single-handed, before you wipe 'em all out!"

"The neatest bit of butcherin' I ever saw—it was!" added Little Buckshot.

"General, will you please raise a white flag to keep them Indians right where they are till I can make a full report," cried Dave, seeing how uneasy Spotted-Tail sat on his horse watching what was going on. "They'll not stir till I tell 'em to, after the flag is seen. Buffalo Bill and me promised peace."

"I'll show the flag," said the general. "That can do no harm, while I hear who they are and what Buffalo Bill and you have taken upon yourselves to promise."

And instantly a white handkerchief, raised on a drawn saber, told the Indians that the pale-face warriors desired peace.

"Now, Dave, tell me what Indians those are."

"First, a band of Comanches, that were under a chief known as Klamat the Tiger."

"I have heard of him—a blood-thirsty savage."

"He is done for now. It was with him I had the little difference which you have been looking at."

"A pretty heavy difference, I should say. But go on."

"The rest are Sioux, under command of Spotted-Tail. Mrs. Spotted Tail and Miss Spotted-Tail, an angel in red, are in the party."

"Spotted-Tail—the deadliest enemy of the whites—worse than Red Cloud ever was!" exclaimed General Custer.

"Buffalo Bill and me have worked the old cuss over, general. He has promised peace, and you can bet your shoulder-straps he'll keep his word!"

"If he does it will be better than a dozen campaigns—better than my Washita victory."

"Nary time, gin'ral, nary time! We wiped out nigh two hundred varmints there. They'll never forget it!" said California Joe.

"If you will permit me to ride back now, general, to get my clothes on and get my arms, I'll tell the Indians to go into camp on one side of the brook, while you can take the other, and you can see Spotted-Tail and his chiefs, and bind 'em down with a strong talk!"

"All right, my brave man. But it seems you fought a regular duel, a knife-battle with that blood-thirsty Comanche, Klamat. What was that about?"

"General, I almost hate to tell you, but I suppose I must. He was in love with Dove-Eye, the daughter of Spotted-Tail, and so was I. He called me a pale-face dog, and I knocked him down. Then we fought it out, and I got the best of it!"

"Ay—that I saw, and how he wiped out his defeat. Oh, woman—woman—thou art the foundation of all of man's troubles! What a blessed thing it is to be a bachelor!"

And the general laughed heartily as he said this. Then he requested Dave to tell the Indians to go into camp on one side of the stream which meandered through the timber, while he took the other side for his camp.

Dave now went back to Spotted-Tail, who received him with more respect than ever.

"You are no longer a Little Brave!" he said. "You are a Great Brave, and I adopt you for my son, and I name you, E-to-nee—the Tiger Killer!"

"Do you hear that, Dove-Eye?" cried Dave, delighted. "The old man says I'm his son. Do you ratify?"

"Dove-Eye is glad that the Little Brave has conquered his enemy. Here are his weapons!" said the girl, without the least show of feeling, as she handed Dave his hunting-shirt, rifle, and belts

Dave was disappointed, and he almost felt glad as he saw the faces of cowering hate which the remaining Comanches bent upon him. He wanted another fight if he couldn't get that girl to love him.

The scout now conveyed the directions of the general to Spotted-Tail, and the Indians of his tribe at once went into camp. But the Comanches went and took up the body of Klamat and wrapping it in his robes, held themselves aloof in gloomy council until the sun went down.

Then, when Dave was arranging with Spotted-Tail for a "talk" to take place that night between him and the general, the oldest brave of the Comanches approached the spot where the scout stood.

"Pale-face!" said he, "the Comanches will go back to their own land to bury their chief in the ground where his fathers have been laid. But the spirit of the great Tiger of the Comanches will never rest while you walk the earth. We go now because our chief shook hands with Spotted-Tail, and we will not break his peace. But we shall come wherever you go, and we shall take your scalp!"

The Comanche turned away before Dave could reply, and a minute afterward the whole band rode away in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DYING CHIEF AND THE PORTRAITS.

Buffalo Bill could not rest after he had satisfied his hunger on his roasted elk, for he wanted to see what was going on in the camp of the Black-Foot. So, telling Red Plume to remain with Sunflower and the captain, while he went out to scout, he left the cave and again clambered up the precipice and proceeded to his lookout. He had brought his rifle this time, for he intended, if it could be done with any degree of safety, to get near enough to see where Spotted-Tail was kept, and, if possible, to take the range so as to attempt his release in the night.

When he got to the overlooking point, the scout adjusted his glass and commenced his observations.

"The Sioux are on the war-path!" was his first exclamation. "But they are fighting the Black-Foot in squads. There does not seem to be a general battle. Ah! one of the Black-Foot is leaving in a hurry. A courier to rally the rest of the tribe, I reckon. I'll spoil his game if he comes inside of a half-mile range!"

This last remark was made when Buffalo Bill saw a single Indian, mounted on a powerful horse, dash away from the camp and ride off to the north-west, in a course which would bring him almost in rifle-shot of the scout.

The latter at once left his position, and taking the back of a ravine for cover in his route, ran with hot haste to reach a point which would bring him within shot of the Indian.

He did not get another sight of him until he had reached an abrupt point of rocks, where a gorge through the mountain left a pass easy to traverse.

"He'll come through here, I bet!" said the scout, as he paused to get a breath, for he was pretty nearly "blowed," to use a Western phrase.

An instant later, before the shake was out of his form, the Indian came in sight.

Buffalo Bill drew back behind a stunted cedar-tree, and for once in his life took a rest. He generally scorned to do this, always firing off-hand, as quick as thought, when he raised rifle or pistol. But he was all of a tremor from

his run, and he knew if he missed at his first shot the red would be very apt to take cover and get away.

So he covered his man, as he came nearly head on, and at full a hundred yards he let him have his compliments.

He was almost sure he missed, for the Indian never swerved in his seat, and the horse bounded steadily forward; so he took another sight over his rifle and fired again.

Just as his finger touched the trigger the horse raised to leap over a fallen tree, and the bullet pierced his head instead of the breast of the Indian.

The horse fell, and the Indian went with him.

Seeing that the latter did not rise, the scout, with his weapon cocked, approached the spot and found that his first ball had done its mission—had pierced the breast of the red man.

But what astonished Buffalo Bill most, was, that this Indian was no other than Yellow Bear, yet alive, but dying.

The chief recognized him, and gasped his name—"Long-Rifle."

"Yes, it is me," said the scout. "Yellow Bear is about done his journey. I did not know it was him when I fired—but it is fate. I made a promise to Spotted-Tail once and now I suppose if I ever see him again I can keep it."

The dying chief did not seem to notice what the scout was saying, but with a spasmodic effort he tugged at a thong which was about his neck until he pulled a buckskin bag from under his hunting-shirt.

"Take and keep. This is for Cindah the Sunflower," gasped the chief. "When she goes to the happy hunting-grounds, she will know her father and mother, if she keeps this."

The old chief raised the bag in his hand, looked fixedly on the sky, and then his head fell back. He was dead.

Buffalo Bill looked at him an instant, almost with pity. Then he said:

"I'm sorry I gave my word to Spotted-Tail to present your scalp to him, but I did, and I must keep it. I don't like to lift hair—it is rather out of my line, as many reds as I've laid out, too—but I must do it before I leave you, old boy. One comfort is—it will not hurt you. But this bag—I'll see what is in it. He might want to poison that gal."

The scout opened the bag, and found in it two morocco cases.

On opening one, he saw two beautifully painted miniatures, done on ivory, facing each other. One was the portrait of a woman, with light, golden-colored hair, blue eyes, and features lovely in the extreme. The other was that of a man, young and handsome, but with a darker face, and dark hair. Under the picture of the woman, written on the ivory, was the name, "Adele Benoist."

Under the picture of the man was written, "Edouart Benoist."

The astonished scout gazed for a moment on these pictures, and then opened the other case.

It contained the picture of an infant—a perfect little cherub of beauty, with a wealth of golden curls, framing in the loveliest face that Buffalo Bill ever saw. He looked at it an instant, and muttered:

"I've seen a face like that in my dreams, or somewhere."

Under this picture was written, "Cecile Benoist."

Then a thought struck him.

"It is Cindah herself—it is Cindah the Sunflower, as she was, and these are the pictures of her parents. I will

keep them, and take them to her. They may lead her to a happy restoration yet in the outside world."

The scout replaced the portraits in the bag, placed it in his hunting-pouch, and then, with a sigh—for he was too brave and noble for such work—he took the scalp from the head of Yellow Bear.

"I must keep my promise," he said, as he looked at the plaited scalp lock, trimmed with ochre-tinted strings. "Spotted Tail, if he ever sees this scalp, will know it; and he must be free now, or Yellow Bear would not be in flight. I will soon know—but first I must go back to the cave, and tell Cindah what I have found."

The scout now put the scalp out of sight, and then turned back over his trail with much slower steps than those taken when he came.

Once or twice he paused to look down on the plains, and now he saw that the Indians appeared to be concentrated, and that the fighting had ceased.

"I reckon the Sioux are out ahead," he muttered, as he passed on.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DOVE-EYE RECOGNIZES HER FRIEND.

Encamped, with good grazing ground for their horses, plenty of wood and water at hand, and game abundant all around, the cavalry under General Custer were having what Little Buckshot termed a bully time, while the Indians under Spotted-Tail, pleased with sundry presents, were glad to be at peace with warriors who were so much better armed and mounted than they.

Spotted-Tail, his wife, and daughter were the recipients of marked attention from the officers of the command—especially the latter. For the beauty of Dove-Eye was well calculated to touch the sensibilities of those who had but few chances to "bask in beauty's sunshine."

But the girl seemed to pay no heed to these flattering attentions. Bright buttons and shoulder-straps were not attractive in her eyes. And that is more than can be said of the pale-face sisterhood, as a general thing.

Dave Estes, though honored by the general and his officers, and an object of envious admiration among all the Sioux warriors, as well as the adopted son of her father, made no apparent advance in the favor of Dove-Eye.

He had tried to give her presents. She had refused them—sadly, kindly, but firmly. The acceptance of a present means more with a girl of the red race of America than it does with the white ones.

He had asked her what he could do to please her.

"Go and find Long-Rifle for me," was her answer.

And Dave did ask permission of General Custer to go and hunt up his mate. But the general did not wish to spare him until a treaty had been concluded with Spotted-Tail and the other chiefs, and, as smokes had been sent up to call them together, he told him no expedition could leave for the present.

The warriors of the Sioux nation began to come in in answer to the smoke signals, and General Custer had decided that on the third day from the time he encamped he would hold a council, or a "big talk," as Spotted-Tail denominated it.

It was now the second day of the encampment, and it was well advanced, when an officer with an escort came spurring into camp from the east.

He had followed the trail of General Custer's column,

and bore dispatches for that officer.

"From the lieutenant general!" said the officer, as he handed him a sealed packet.

"God bless him! Phil Sheridan is the best cavalryman that ever drew a saber!" said the young general as he broke the seal of the dispatch.

A glow of pleasure lighted up his face while he read it.

"We are going to have a distinguished visitor on the plains in a few weeks," he said. "The lieutenant-general writes to me that the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia is to visit this country, and will come West for a buffalo hunt!"

"He comes late. The buffalo in a few weeks will be all gone from here, and none of them can be found north of the Republican. The deep snows will send them south," said an officer.

"We can follow them. We will have the grandest hunt ever heard of. Spotted-Tail and his band shall be in it," said the young general. "Buffalo Bill must be found; for he knows better than any other man living where buffalo are to be found, no matter what the season is."

"Then may I take a party and go and look for him?" asked Dave Estes.

"Not until after the council has been held," said the general. "We need you till then."

"Let Dove-Eye go now," said the young daughter of Spotted-Tail. "She will find Long-Rifle if he lives, or revenge him if he is dead."

"I wish she loved me as she loves Buffalo Bill!" murmured the young scout. "The gal is just crazy after him. I told her he was married, but that didn't make a bit of difference with her. She said he was a great hunter and could feed a dozen wives."

General Custer laughed, but the girl looked as grave as ever.

It was near sunset, and the soldiers were all gathering together in anticipation of roll-call, when a large band of Indians were reported coming in from the West.

The command was put under arms as usual, until the character of the visitors was ascertained.

Suddenly, with a wild scream of joy, Dove-Eye bounded upon the horse of the general, which stood saddled close by, and screaming out one name, she dashed off to meet the advancing column.

The name which left her lips as she rode off, was—

"Long-Rifle!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A LITTLE SURPRISE.

"Well—that's cool," said General Custer, laughing, as the beautiful young squaw dashed away on his horse. "What does she mean by shouting Long-Rifle!"

"She sees Buffalo Bill coming, general," said Dave Estes. "The gal has gone clean crazy after him. I'd give everything but my right arm to have her love me as she loves him."

"Let not E-to-nee grieve," said Spotted-Tail, "he shall have ten of the handsomest women in my tribe for his wives."

"Thank you, boss—but I'd rather have one, and that one my choice. Ten would keep me on the hunt all the time, I'm afraid."

The attention of all—officers and men—was now riveted on the approaching party.

In front of the Indians rode Buffalo Bill on his favorite Powder Face, while by his right side rode a white girl, so strangely, wildly beautiful in the picturesque dress of an Indian maiden, that the general and his officers spoke their wonder aloud.

On his left, Dove-Eye rode, proudly managing the spirited horse of the general, while behind him came a Black-Foot Indian—without war paint—it was Red Plume—and a white man, Captain Boyd.

Behind with their lances full of scalps, and uttering yells which victorious warriors only can give, came Young Bear and a large party of Sioux.

Buffalo Bill, rather abashed, with a lovely girl on each side of him, of such different types of beauty, halted when near the spot where General Custer and his staff stood, and saluted.

"I am glad to see you, my brave friend," said the general. "You see that your peace treaty with Spotted-Tail has not only been kept, but ratified. We will make it a formal treaty to-morrow, so as to send a report to Washington."

"I thank you, general, for your welcome. I hardly expected this pleasure an hour ago. But I have something here for Spotted-Tail. I made him a promise when I asked him to keep peace with the white men. I told him I would rescue Dove-Eye, and give him the scalp of her captor. There it is."

Buffalo Bill handed a scalp to the Sioux chief.

The moment the latter looked at it he pronounced the name of Yellow Bear.

"Yes, it is his scalp. I laid the old fellow out and lifted his hair," said the scout. "My promises have all been kept. Now keep yours—never let your tribe raise knife or hatchet to the pale-faces while you live."

"Spotted-Tail has given you his word and he will keep it," said the chief, firmly. Then taking the hand of Dove-Eye, who had returned the horse of the general to his orderly, he led her toward the scout, and said:

"She loves you. Take Dove-Eye and treat her well."

Buffalo Bill blushed scarlet. Then he stammered out:

"Not for me, I thank you. I've got the sweetest, best, and prettiest little wife that ever blessed a home. I want no other. Dove-Eye—there is Dave Estes, as brave a chap as ever raised a rifle. He loves you. Take him and he will make you happy."

Dove-Eye looked at the noble scout for an instant, without speaking.

Tears gathered in her dark, mournful eyes. Then she said, in a low, faltering tone:

"If Dove-Eye cannot be the wife of Long-Rifle, no man shall press her hand and call her his! Dove-Eye has spoken."

The beautiful girl drew her robe up over her face and turned away toward her father's lodge.

"And now," said General Custer, bowing low, "will you be so kind as to tell us who this beautiful white lady in Indian costume is?"

"I am afraid she cannot tell herself, general, and I am sure I cannot. She has been reared from infancy by Yellow Bear, the Black-Foot chief. He called her his daughter, but when he was dying he gave me a bag with the miniature of a babe, a man, and a woman. By what he said, I am sure that they are the pictures of herself as an infant, and of her father and mother. She has them, and will show them to you."

The girl reached out the bag, and General Custer took the picture and read the names aloud.

"Benoist? There are Benoists in Californy—I seen one on the Mokelumne," cried California Joe. "He came from Missouri, and he wasn't a pike neither. He was all man, he was. I saw him shoot two Greasers and a Digger Indian, all in one morning."

The general paid no attention to Joe's remark, but turning to Cindah, he said:

"You shall have a tent for your own occupation, until we can reach a point where inquiries can be made that may restore you to living relatives."

"I will not stay anywhere unless the Dream Spirit is with me," said Cindah, in a determined tone, and she pointed to Captain Boyd.

"Who's the gentleman?" asked the general, as he now took notice of the young captain.

"You should know me, if your memory is good, general," said the captain, in a soft and pleasant tone.

"It seems to me as if I had seen you before," said General Custer, striving to think when and where.

"Do you remember making a capture after General Stuart was killed?" asked the captain, with a peculiar smile.

"Great Heaven! It is Miss Belle Boyd herself!" cried the general.

"Exactly, general. So you see if this beautiful girl, who has known no other name than that of Cindah the Sunflower, will permit me to share the same tent, there will be no harm."

"None in the world, Fair Rebel, as I used to call you. But look to the girl—she is white as snow—she is about to faint!"

"No, no," cried Cindah, waving them all back. "It will stop in a minute. I—I loved the Dream Spirit, for I thought he would be my husband."

"I will be as near like a sister as I can till you find those who are nearer," said Belle Boyd; "and to make myself more presentable I will try and manufacture more suitable apparel for myself, if there are any dry goods within reach."

"We will find some," said General Custer.

And then he gave orders for a tent to be set near his own for the two females, and ordered Buffalo Bill, as soon as he got some supper, to come and tell him all about his late adventures.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE COMANCHE'S REVENGE.

Nearly two months had passed away. The Sioux having pledged themselves to peace, were allowed to roam undisturbed over their extensive hunting-grounds. But now the snows of winter and the bleak, terrific storms of the season had driven their favorite game, the buffalo, far to the south, while only the elk, red deer, and antelope remained, for large game, in the old ranges.

Buffalo Bill and his mate were once more located in their pleasant quarters at Fort McPherson, near the junction of the North and South Platte.

Our hero, with his wife and little ones, and twin sisters, now forgot the hardships and perils of his late trip in the mountains, or only remembered them to thank Heaven they were passed.

Near the fort, where he could see the officers who prized him so much every day, where he could exercise his favorite Powder Face when he liked, and knock over an antelope or a red deer whenever he chose to ride a mile or two from home, Buffalo Bill felt contented and happy.

Dave Estes, his almost inseparable friend, was the companion of every hunt and ride, and few men enjoyed life better—at least, in that desolate region.

In quarters assigned them by the kindness of those in power were Cindah the Sunflower, who had taken to reading and study, though she dreamed a great deal yet; Miss Belle Boyd, who was engaged in writing a book, and Red Plume, whose sole joy seemed to consist in serving his two mistresses—for both treated him very much like a servant—a favorite one, it is true, yet like a servant.

Cindah, believing her name to be Cecile Benoist, had assumed it, and, dressed like other ladies, was very, very beautiful, though all said she seemed more beautiful in her old costume.

General Custer had sent to the press in the East some account of her history, so far as known, in hopes that some trace of her parents might be found, or at least some kindred which might, perhaps, lift her above the needs of charity. For the poor girl, with her almost supernatural beauty, had no knowledge of a way by which she could gain an honorable livelihood, and her haughty spirit revolted at the thought of being dependent on any one.

To relieve her mind on this point, the general had told her a story which she believed, whether it was so or not, that the government would take care of her till her parents were found, and it was her right and not a favor.

This contented her; and visited in a friendly way by the officers, who all treated her with profound respect, she thought the new world she had come into a decided improvement on the one left in the mountains.

* * * * *

"Mate, I'm going to get an antelope for Major Brown. He has some friends coming from North Platte to dinner!" said Dave Estes to Buffalo Bill, very early, on a bright, sunny morning about eight or ten weeks after they had got settled in quarters. "Will you go along?"

"I can't, Dave," said Buffalo Bill; "not this morning, I mean. You know the boys outside the fort have elected me Justice of the Peace, and now two of 'em have got up a suit, I reckon, just to see what I know. But no matter what it is for—it is to come off at ten o'clock this morning, and I can't leave."

"All right, squire," said Dave, laughing. "I can go alone. I'll knock over a couple while I'm about it, and bring one home for you!"

"All right, Dave! But look out for your hair, mate. Remember what those Comanches threatened!"

"Sho! There isn't a Comanche within three hundred miles of here. They'll keep shy of me, you bet, after they saw me take down their Tiger. I ought to have won Dove-Eye in that fight, but the gal loved you, and there was no hope for me!"

"As much for you as for her, Dave. You know I am as true as steel itself to a true hand, to my home angels, but never mind. Good luck to you on the hunt!"

"Thank you, Bill. Good-morning."

Dave went away, and the scout turned to look at a volume of the Statutes of Nebraska, which he had before him.

Poring over this, he did not hear the call to breakfast till his sweet sister Nellie had repeated it for the third time.

He had just taken his seat, when an orderly from the fort came rushing in, booted and spurred, his saber jingling, shouting:

"You're wanted, sir—quick, too, at headquarters. Indians are in sight of the fort, and have just shot down a man! The troops are mounting!"

"Poor Dave!" groaned the noble scout, as intuitively his heart and head told him who had fallen. "The Comanches have killed and scalped him; I would wager life upon it."*

In a minute he was armed, and mounting, as he often did, without saddle or bridle, he rode Powder-Face at full speed to the fort.

In less than five minutes the troops were out and in pursuit of the Indians. But mounted on the best of horses, they went like the wind over the plains, and pursuit was vain.

They found the body of Dave Estes literally riddled with Comanche arrows, and with his scalp torn from his head.

How long the Indians had lurked around, sparing others, most likely, while they waited for him, no one could tell. But there were signs that they had been concealed among the sand-knolls near by, for the night, at least, if not longer.

The body was brought in by Buffalo Bill, and it was given Christian burial in the burying-ground attached to the fort, where now the visitor can see that the heroic young lover of Dove-Eye has not been forgotten by those who knew him well and loved him, too.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HUNTING PARTY.

Like the triumph of some great conqueror; honored, not for his title, but more because his country has ever been the steadfast friend of America; respected because more of a man and less of a snob than many a titled fool who has been the recipient of snobbish idolatry—the Grand Duke Alexis had passed into and over the northern boundary of the United States.

He had been *feted* in several of our largest cities, he had danced with some of our fairest belles, and now a new pleasure was to be his.

He was to see the true native American in feathers and paint, the game of the boundless plains, and the border-men of the far West.

Escorted by General Sheridan and other brave and accomplished men, traveling in truly imperial style, the noble visitor had arrived at Omaha—at that time the city of less than a decade of years, but the thriving proof of how cities spring up and grow in America.

The special train was about to start, when General Sheridan was approached by three persons.

The first was a gentleman whose snow-white hair and long silvery beard spoke of fully seventy years of age. Yet his form was erect, his bearing dignified, and every token about him, from his rich, plain apparel to the glance of his eye, indicative of a true and high-toned gentleman—one whose respectability did not depend upon wealth alone.

With this old gentleman were two younger men, their features giving proof of a relationship, who looked fully as genteel as their father.

The old gentleman presented a letter to General Sheridan—an open letter of introduction.

The lieutenant-general glanced hastily at it, bowed low to the bearer and asked him to be seated, for this meeting took place in his special car, soon to start for the plains.

"The wishes of the President, and his personal desires, are as much to me as his orders," said General Sheridan, when he had finished reading the letter. "It will be a pleasure for me to serve you and forward your desires. To do it best, I shall ask you and your sons to join my family, as I term my staff and friends, on this excursion. No excuse need be offered—if you have your baggage at hand, put it at once in the baggage-car. Captain," he added, to an aid, "these gentlemen are my guests. Be so kind as to see them well quartered and attended to."

A message from the superintendent, asking if all were ready for a start, now reached the general, and required that he should see if the Grand Duke were ready, that the word might be given.

Ten minutes later, and away over the iron rails sped the train into a region almost as boundless, and in winter full as dreary as the far-famed "Steppes of Russia"—those endless tale-lands about which so much has been written.

Away, with almost lightning speed, amid comforts unsurpassed in the hotels he had left, the Grand Duke and his gallant escort were whirled.

But what is this part of the excursion to us? A mere nothing. The best part will come only when the cars have stopped.

When the train thundered across the long bridge of the Platte, and with a scream closed its brakes and shut off steam from the drivers, at the long, straggling town of North Platte, then the Grand Duke began to see signs of the new life which was here to dawn upon him. He had been looking at glitter and show for a long while—now, as "Mark Twain" says, in his quaint way, he was to learn something about "roughing it."

The train stopped, and a thousand men and women of every grade were there to look at it and the visitors. But the eyes of the Grand Duke settled on a group of army officers, and a small body of cavalry, which stood "to horse" near-by, and longest, steadiest of all, his gaze rested on a man over six feet in height, with long brown hair floating over his broad shoulders, a face bold, fearless, and free from any ignoble trace, whose keen, searching eye seemed to look right through what it rested on.

This man of such graceful form that he has been often termed the Apollo of the Plains, was dressed from head to foot in a suit of buckskin, tastefully trimmed with beads and fringes, and looking the true nobleman of nature that he is, drew that imperial gaze upon himself at once.

"Who is that, general?" asked the Grand Duke, the moment he stepped from the car.

He glanced at the man in buckskin, who stood with his rifle in the hollow of his left arm, leaning against his horse.

"That, your highness, is Buffalo Bill!" said General Sheridan. "He is the best hunter, scout, and guide in all this region, and he has been selected to arrange and head our hunt!"

"Be so kind as to introduce me to him!"

"Mr. Cody," said the general, as he beckoned to the hunter to advance. "This is the Grand Duke Alexis, of Russia. He wishes to know you!"

The Grand Duke frankly extended his hand, and Buffalo Bill, grasping it, shook it warmly.

* The writer only takes the liberty to alter the time slightly. He gives facts in this sad ending of the life of one of the bravest little scouts that ever served his country.

"I have heard of you, and I am glad to meet you!" said the duke.

"I've heard of you, sir, also, and have been told you like hunting. We will try to show you some sport, though the season is late!" replied the scout, with as much ease and politeness as any officer in the group around could have shown.

Then turning to General Sheridan, the hunter said:

"The horses are all out in camp, general—on Willow Creek, and we are ready for a start. I thought you'd like the ambulance best on the start!"

"You are right," said the hero of Winchester and a hundred other victorious fields. "We will have enough of the saddle when we get to camp!"

Now all was hurry for the departure.

The general and all his guests had ambulances ready for them; there were baggage wagons for the baggage, and the horses of the escort pawed the earth impatiently for a start.

A half-hour more and away across the quicksand ford, where Buffalo Bill and the writer once had a race on an Indian raid to see which would be first to the northern bank—away over the plains with rapid gait until night closing in found them at the camp on Willow Creek.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

The morning came, clear and beautiful, and when the Grand Duke at dawn took his coffee with his host, General Sheridan, he glanced with pleasure at the cloudless sky in which the stars were fading from view.

"Buffalo Bill tells me that what with Indian arrivals and the noise of camp, we have started the game in our vicinity, and will have a two hours' ride to reach it," said General Sheridan to his guest.

"I am fond of riding—the distance is nothing!" said the Grand Duke. "But will the Indians hunt with us?"

"Only a few of their chiefs. After the hunt I will give your highness a fair look at them as they are!"

"Thank you, general. I am anxious to see all of the characteristic features of your great country while I am here. Ah—ladies here? I did not know we were to be honored by their presence."

"A special party from Fort McPherson, your highness," said the general. "Of course, they are anxious to see you—but as our horses are ready we must make them wait till this day's hunt is over."

A minute later and the Grand Duke, with all who were to join in the hunt, were in the saddle and off—not a brilliant, but a serviceable party in looks at any rate.

The Grand Duke in a plain hunting suit, the officers in undress uniform, the scouts and hunters all in buckskin—Buffalo Bill leading all—it was a glorious party.

General Custer, with Spotted-Tail, the chief, now well and fit for work, rode in company with Buffalo Bill, taking the start to see and announce when a buffalo herd was in sight.

On over the short ridges, through the narrow canons, for fully two hours, and then, opening into a fine plain, the buffalo were in sight and close at hand.

Now the Grand Duke, with Buffalo Bill for his guide, was given the place of honor in front.

General Sheridan and Custer came next, and with all

ready—the word to start was given.

Away, without a word, flew the noble visitor and his guide—quickly the rest followed, for feeding not a quarter of a mile away were a thousand or more of the wild cattle of the plains—the far-famed buffalo—or "*Bos Americanus*."

On—on, pressed the duke—the trained horse furnished by Buffalo Bill needing neither spur nor rein, when the game was in sight, and soon, with the herd all alarmed and on the run, they were closing up.

A fine cow was within the reach of Buffalo Bill's hand, but he did not fire. He knew that courtesy should give the Grand Duke the first shot, and pointing to the body just behind the shoulder, he cried:

"Let her have it there."

The duke, sitting like a Centaur on his horse, raised his short rifle, one he had brought from home, and the ball went to the heart of the animal.

One bound—one wild shout and the first buffalo, at the first shot, went down.

Then for a mad, swift half hour, it was slaughter—nothing more or less.

A few mishaps, a tumble here and there, but nothing serious, and then that day's hunt was over.

The Grand Duke was delighted. To him it was the grandest sport he had ever seen.

To Buffalo Bill—it was play.

Why, he had killed sixty-nine of those great beasts in one day, alone and unaided, tiring out three horses in the run. (A fact.) The whole party this day had not killed more. Yet if they were satisfied, he was.

Night had set in when the party returned to camp, tired enough to eat their suppers and go to bed.

The dawn of another day, and now the Grand Duke was to see the American Indians as they are.

Spotted-Tail, with his family, his sub-chiefs—Fast Bear, Young Beaver, Red Leaf, Two Strike and others—and with a large band of his warriors, would show him some of their peculiarities in the shape of a war dance, etc.

This day, like the one before, was clear and propitious.

The Indians, crossing from their camp in all the show of paint and feathers, were drawn up near the camp of the visiting pale-faces, and for the time the Grand Duke and his escort passed about and among them on a tour of inspection.

Dove-Eye—sad, thin, and pale sat on a horse near her father when Buffalo Bill rode up.

He greeted her kindly, and told her that the Little Brave had been killed and scalped.

"I shall now see him in the happy hunting grounds," she said, sadly. "Dove-Eye will see the spring flowers once more, and then she will die."

The scout felt sad to hear her speak thus, for he knew well that it was that strange mystery, love, hopeless love, which was thus eating up the roots of life. But he could not help it.

The Grand Duke now fell back into the line of officers and visitors, and the Indians gave their entertainment, a novel one to him, and one which he never will forget.

To describe it all would be a waste of time and space, and we have something better for our readers, which it would be wrong to keep back any longer.

Grouped in the rear of the Grand Duke and his suite, and back from General Sheridan and his staff and friends, was the party of ladies who had come from Fort McPherson to see the hunt and the hunters.

We will not name all; in fact, but two claim our

especial attention just now.

One of these, mounted on a fine horse, was Cindah the Sunflower, gloriously beautiful in the dress of civilization. Next her, sitting her horse gracefully, was pretty, jaunty, saucy-looking Belle Boyd, looking as if she would like to be a rebel again, just to be contrary, if she could.

Near General Sheridan, standing within a yard indeed, was the elderly gentleman and his two sons, who had met the general at Omaha and become his guests.

The Indian show was over, and General Custer now said to his superior officer:

"I have some ladies to introduce to the Grand Duke and yourself, general. You remember the little romance about a rescued captive from the Black-Foot, which I wrote to you about, do you not?"

"Yes, yes; and that reminds me of another thing. I have a letter from the President, introducing to me a gentleman who has an interest in that romance, if there is any reality in it. I will introduce the bearer. Mr. Benoist—General Custer."

"Benoist! Is your name Benoist?" asked the general, in surprise.

"Yes, sir—Edouart Benoist."

"Heavens! Excuse me a moment."

General Custer rushed away to the group of ladies. He was gone but an instant, and when he came back he bore the morocco cases which Yellow Bear when dying gave to Buffalo Bill.

"Do you know these," asked General Custer, as he opened the cases.

"Oh, Heaven! My wife—my child—myself!" cried the old man, trembling from head to foot. "These pictures, eighteen years ago, were in the bosom of my wife when she was on her way to join me at my trading-post. She was killed by the Indians; her body was found, but I never saw my child again."

"You see her now, sir—you see her now!" cried General Custer, as he beckoned Cindah to approach.

The lovely girl came, and the old man with his two sons gazed at her in mingled wonder and hope.

"Who—who are you?" the old man asked, and he trembled from head to foot.

"Cecile Benoist!" she answered, proudly—for nature spoke.

"My child—my child," he cried, and the arms of the grand old man were about her form in a second more.

And she, for the first time in all her memory, wept with him, not knowing why she wept.

For she had been reared to scorn tears, to hide all semblance of human weakness—of nature's feeling.

"Your brothers," said the old man, as soon as he could recover himself, "your brothers, my Cecile. They are twins, and three years older than you—Armand and Gerald."

"I will love them and you. Can I now go out into the grand world and live like a queen?" asked Cecile.

"Yes, my child—thank Heaven I have a fortune to meet the desires of all three of my children," said Mr. Benoist. "Oh, how much I have to ask and how much to tell you."

"Well, introduce me to that prince first, and then we will talk. Red Plume, why do you stand so close?"

Poor Red Plume fell back from her whom he worshiped, stung by the manner of her expression, but silent and sad, while the heroine of one of the strangest romances of modern times received the introduction she desired.

"What is the matter with Red Plume?" asked Belle

Boyd, as he stood by her side, his eyes downcast, and his breast heaving with ill-suppressed emotion.

"Red Plume is sick. His heart is heavy like lead. He used to have a hold on the heart of Cindah the Sunflower. He learned in secret from her teacher how to write on the speaking paper, so he could tell her when she knew it not that he loved her. And he would watch the color come and go as she read, and happy thoughts danced in her eyes. That time has gone. She has found her kindred. She does not want Red Plume near her. I will go back to the mountains—and die!"

"Go back and live, like the true-hearted warrior that you are, and I will go with you," said the strange girl. "I would rather be the wife of a heroic red man than the gazing stock of insolent white men."

"Good! Red Plume puts his heart on his lips and thanks you. There shall be a warm fire in your lodge always, and plenty of meat for you to eat. You shall have warm furs in winter and good clothes for summer. Red Plume will do all this and more for his pale-face sister. He will do all but forget Cindah the Sunflower. That he cannot do. Her blue eyes will look into his through the mist of dreams when he sleeps. He will see them when he looks at the first flowers of spring, when he gazes upon the deep water or up into the still summer sky. But she, his heart's spirit, has gone with her kindred. Come—we will go back to the hills."

Slowly and sadly Red Plume turned away and Belle Boyd, mounting her horse, followed in his trail.

Buffalo Bill cast a wondering glance at the girl as she rode off, haughty and beautiful in her pride, and then turned to join General Sheridan to make arrangements for the return of the party to the railroad.

As he did so he saw Spotted-Tail advancing toward him.

There was a strange and moody expression on the face of the Sioux chief as he approached the scout, a wild and angry fire in his eye.

"The old cuss looks stormy," muttered Buffalo Bill, as Spotted-Tail drew near. "If he wasn't temperate I'd think he'd been indulging in fire-water. Thunder—he has war paint on his face."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN INDIAN MAIDEN'S HOPELESS LOVE.

"What is the matter with Spotted-Tail? His face has a cloud on it," said the scout, as the old chief, fully armed, strode toward him.

"There is a cloud on the face of Spotted-Tail, and another cloud in his heart. Let Long-Rifle look sharp, and he will see there is lightning in both clouds."

"Long-Rifle does not fear the storm," said the scout, calmly. "What has it to do with him? Spotted-Tail has sworn to keep peace with Long-Rifle and his friends. He will not break his oath?"

The chief looked irresolute, yet angry.

"Spotted-Tail swore this—if Long-Rifle would save Dove-Eye, the heart of his heart, from the hands of Yellow Bear."

"Yes; and I did save her! I kept my word, old man—keep yours."

Buffalo Bill was about to pass on, but the Sioux chief stepped before him, and said:

"Stop! We must talk."

"Well, be in a hurry in what you have to say—I am

waited for at headquarters."

"Let them wait! Spotted Tail is a big chief. Now hear him. He has more warriors in all his bands than there are pale-face soldiers in all the forts upon the plains and in the big hills. He can count more lodges than any other chief that lives. His horses are as many as the antelopes from here to the big hills, and they are swift and strong. He is rich—very rich. All the Sioux, the Big Horn, the Yankton, the Brule, the Ogallalas, call him their great father."

"Well, what of all this?" asked Buffalo Bill, impatiently.

"Wait till I have done—then you talk!" said the chief, now more calm, but still with a haughty, angry look. "Spotted-Tail is a great man—he has no master but the Great Spirit over all—and Dove-Eye is his only daughter. He loves her as no father ever loved before. Shall he see her die, and not complain. Shall she wither and pass away, and he not try to save her?"

"What have I to do with all this?" asked the scout, impatiently.

"All! Long-Rifle has all to do with it. Dove-Eye loves him," said the chief.

"That is no fault of mine. I have never spoken a love-word to her. I have a dear wife and sweet children in my own lodge."

"What does Spotted-Tail care for that? His daughter will be but one more. Her father is rich, and will give Long-Rifle a hundred horses, and as many hunters as he wants to kill meat for him."

"There is no use in wasting time, old man. I wish you and Dove-Eye well. I can do no more. She is red and I am white. The Great Spirit drew a distinction between our races. So let us part, and part friends."

The old chief stood and looked at the brave hunter, the true-hearted scout, a moment, and then he said, in a low, broken tone:

"Spotted-Tail has been very proud. He never knelt except when he whispered to the Great Spirit; but to save the life of Dove-Eye he would kneel to the young pale-face. She will not eat; she will not drink; she will perish, unless Long-Rifle tells her to live."

"I can tell her to live—for her father—for some brave warrior worthy of her hand; but not for me," said the chivalric son of the prairie.

"Dove-Eye will look on no other man. Long-Rifle has cast a spell on her spirit. She is blind to all men but him. She shuts her eyes when her father stands before her. She has closed her ears to his words."

"Again I tell Spotted-Tail that this is not my fault. That is enough. Stand aside now, for I must go to the tent of the Great Soldier Chief and be his guide back to the iron road where the steam-horse waits to draw him away."

"Will not Long-Rifle speak kind words to Dove-Eye, and tell her to eat and drink?"

"Yes, if that will do any good. But I can say no more—do no more. I have to go far away to the East to visit friends who look for me by the side of the Big Waters. And when I am gone, then Dove-Eye will forget me."

"She will never forget Long-Rifle. But now Spotted-Tail will go back to her with a lighter heart. He will tell Dove-Eye that the pale-face brave will come to the lodge of her father and speak to her."

"Yes; I will go before we start for the railroad. Now I must go, for there comes an orderly from General Sheridan."

The chief bowed, and said: "Spotted-Tail will go to tell Dove-Eye you are coming."

And the old chief turned away with a stately step, just as a cavalryman rode up to say that Mr. Cody was wanted at headquarters right away.

"Ride back and tell General Sheridan I'll be on hand in five minutes, and that is as soon as I can get there."

"Not quite, sir, if you take my horse and carry the message yourself," said the soldier, respectfully, but with a smile.

"That is a fact; but I'm as well able to walk as you," said the scout, quietly; and he strode out at a rapid pace.

"Then you'll not ride in, sir?"

"No; I'll be there nearly as soon as you, without you use your spurs."

The soldier laughed, gave his horse the rein, and in a couple of minutes reported to the general that the hunter, guide, and scout was close at hand.

"Can we reach the railroad by dark, Cody?" asked General Sheridan, as the former saluted in front of his marquee.

"Yes, sir, if we start soon. There are three relays of horses on the road, and if you and the Grand Duke go in the lightest ambulance, with only the escort, we can go in on the run."

"All right, then. Have Colonel Forsyth notified, and we will start inside the hour."

Buffalo Bill saluted and hastened to report to the gallant officer named by the general—the hero, by the way, of one of the toughest Indian fights on record.

Then, while the ambulance teams were being harnessed and the escort getting ready, Buffalo Bill mounted his horse and rode over to the Sioux encampment to keep his promise to the chief.

For his nature was too chivalric to permit him to forget his promise, and he really felt sorrow for the Indian girl who had shown so much feeling for him—far more than maidens of her race are apt to show.

Most Indian women, reared as slaves to cruel masters, rather than as wives to be loved and cared for, seem to be as cold and heartless as the masters themselves are.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A PAINFUL INTERVIEW.

"The Long-Rifle is a true man! He has kept his word with Spotted-Tail, for he comes even while the Great Soldier Chief is breaking camp to go on his journey."

This was said by Spotted-Tail, as Buffalo Bill rode at full gallop into his camp and halted where the chief stood in front of his lodge.

"Where is your girl? What I have to say must be said soon. The camp is breaking up, and I must lead in, as I led out," said the scout.

"In there; she is weak and sick. Say kind words to save her life, for she is the heart of my heart. Spotted-Tail is a child when he thinks she will die before his face!"

The scout made no reply, but dismounted and entered the lodge.

A fire was blazing in its center, for it was a cold, bleak day. By its blaze everything inside the lodge was made plainly visible.

Seated on a bed of furs, her hands crossed upon her bosom, her eyes cast down, was Dove-Eye, so pale, so sad-faced, that the noble-hearted scout felt both pity and surprise.

The girl raised her eyes only when he stood before her and spoke, and then with a look so hopeless and desolate, that it spoke more than words could say.

"What ails my sister, the beautiful Rose of the Sioux Nation?" he asked, in a gentle tone. "Her father tells me she is sick—that she will neither eat nor drink. Is she not hungry or dry?"

"Yes—hungry like the babe when its mother is dead and there is no milk for it—dry like the ground when there is no rain to cool its hot bosom. Dove-Eye is hungry for what cannot be hers. She is sick here!"

And the poor girl, sad-voiced, laid her hand over her heart.

"Long-Rifle is very sorry. Will not Dove-Eye eat and drink and grow strong for his sake?"

"For him? Does Long-Rifle ask her to be strong for his sake?"

The scout did not wish to pain her, nor yet to let her misconstrue the intent of his words.

He answered, in a low, kind tone:

"Long-Rifle wishes Dove-Eye to live. If she does not eat, she will die. If she does not drink, she will perish."

"Will Long-Rifle take Dove-Eye with him, if she eats and drinks?"

"He cannot now, for he must ride very fast at the head of the escort, to take the Great Chiefs back to the iron road?"

"Will he let Dove-Eye follow him? She will be no trouble to him. She has her own horses, her own lodge, her own blankets, and hunters to get meat for her."

"Dove-Eye could not travel so far as I am going," replied the scout. "I am going off to where the sun rises. Where the villages of my race are so large that it takes almost a sun to ride through one of them. Dove-Eye could never stand such journeys as Long-Rifle must take."

"Then she could die where her eyes could look their last upon him!"

"Long-Rifle does not want Dove-Eye to die. She must live for her father."

"Dove-Eye has lived for him long enough. She wants to live for Long-Rifle now."

"Then eat and drink and live. Long-Rifle must go now. The Great Chiefs wait for him."

"Stop—stop one breath, that Dove Eye may know what she is to do. Is she to go to the lodge of Long-Rifle by the river, where the big trees grow and the white braves have their fort?"

"No. Dove-Eye must stay with her father. There is a wife in the lodge of Long-Rifle who will let no other wife come there."

"Then Dove-Eye must die. The flower that has no sun to shine upon it by day, no dew to set its lips at night, must die. Why did Long-Rifle come here? He came to mock the poor Indian girl."

"No; he came to comfort her, to ask her to live."

"To live, and not for him? Dove-Eye cannot—will not! Go, great brave, go; and the Great Spirit guard you! Dove-Eye will whisper to Him every night while she lives and ask Him to make Long-Rifle happy!"

The beautiful girl bowed her head upon her rounded arms, and a sob broke from her lips as the hunter turned to go.

But again Spotted-Tail stood in his path.

"Long-Rifle has spoken with a forked tongue to the red man," he said, sternly. "He told Spotted-Tail he would come with words of comfort to his child. He has not

spoken them. She bows her head, for her heart is all gone!"

"Chief, I have spoken straight words. I have asked her to live for you. I have asked her for my sake to eat and drink and grow strong. If she will not, and she dies, it is not my fault. So, good-by. I will stay no longer. I have my duty to do, and will do it!"

The firm tone and look of the scout told full well that he would remain no longer, and Spotted Tail was too near the camp of the white soldiers to dare to use force, though his looks told that he would have done so gladly had he dared.

So he fell back out of the way of the young scout, who went forth with a consciousness of having kept his promise, and having tried to cure the girl of her obstinate and useless passion.

In another second he was in his saddle, riding at full speed toward headquarters.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BUFFALO BILL TAKES THE REINS.

"Well, Mr. Cody—all ready for a start?" said General Sheridan, as he left the marquee in company with his imperial guest and approached the ambulance, which the scout was carefully examining to see that running gear, harness and all, was in perfect order.

"Yes, general; I was looking things over to see if they would stand wear and tear, for we've got to rush things to get in by dark."

"All right, my brave man—all right. Had you not better take the reins and show the Grand Duke how you used to drive the overland? He has read about Hank Monk taking Horace Greeley over the Sierra Nevadas in six hours, and he cannot believe it."

"Wait till we get to the Long Canon, general, and I'll drive there. There is a four-mile stretch down hill, and I think I can accommodate his views as to speed."

"All right. In the meantime you ride at the rate which will carry us through, and the teams must be kept to it. For my escort—they're used to going like leaves before a gale. Ah! General Custer is in the saddle. I thought he would take the other ambulance."

"Not before him, general," said the scout, in so low a tone that the Grand Duke, who was looking at the young general, did not notice his remark.

"How did he become a general while yet so young?" asked the Grand Duke, turning to General Sheridan. "In Russia, few gain that rank before their hairs have become white in service."

"General Custer, like many others now in our camp, won his stars by dash and bravery, your imperial highness," said General Sheridan. "During our late civil war old-fogyism went by the board, as you sailors say, and true merit took its place. I do not know exactly how old Custer was when he got his brigadier's stars, but I remember that the gallant Charles C. Dodge was made a brigadier when he was not quite twenty-three years old. Gallantry was never overlooked by the noble Lincoln, and those whom he placed in position deserved it. I hope it will not be forgotten in our country, for he who serves, knowing service is rewarded, will be faithful and zealous."

"True, general. Yours, though a young country, is great in ideas and in progress. I have learned more in a few weeks in America of what men can be and what a people can do, than I had ever dreamed of before. There are two countries which, united, could bid defiance to an armed

world outside. America and Russia are those countries."

"America, your imperial highness, extends from Cape Horn to the Pole!"

"True—but I mean the United States—the only part of the continent that I recognize as America proper. Those Republics of the South—Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, Chili, and the rest—ever mixed in civil broils and constant revolutions, amount to nothing. It is the land which exists under that beautiful flag that I speak of."

The noble visitor pointed to the small company flag carried by the color bearer, as he spoke.

"I believe your imperial highness means more than a compliment," said General Sheridan, smiling.

"I do, indeed. And do not you think so, general? You have been in Europe in war-time. Did the French and Germans fight such battles as you have seen here?"

"No, your imperial highness—to speak the truth, they did not. They fought well, in some cases splendidly, but our armies fought desperately. Such courage as that at Shiloh, Malvern Hill, Gettysburg and others that I could name, never was seen in Europe."

Thus General Sheridan and his imperial guest rode on, freely giving their opinions to each other until they had changed horses at the first relay, and with a fresh team of four noble bays were dashing forward with renewed speed.

"We are about to enter the Long Canon, general. Shall I take the reins now?" asked our hero, as they rode up alongside of the mountains.

"Yes, I have told the Grand Duke so much about our overland journeys before the railroad was built, that I want him to see how the trip could be made from sea to sea in two weeks over snow-capped mountains and across parched deserts."

Buffalo Bill signed to the driver to check his horses, then leaped from his saddle and took the reins, while the ambulance driver took his horse.

The escorts, some in front and others in the rear, were ordered to look out for themselves, for Buffalo Bill was known as an experienced and fearless driver, and some "tall driving" was looked for when he got on the box.

The canon was narrow, high bluffs rising on either side, but it had the advantage of being nearly straight, tolerably smooth, though in places rather steep, being a descent in all its grade.

"All ready, general. Tell his highness to keep his cap strapped down, for the ambulance curtains are all up."

"All right, my hero—give them the string!"

Buffalo Bill drew the reins well in till he felt every bit, then he swung the heavy lash in the air and gave a yell which woke the echoes miles away.

The horses seemed to know who was behind them, for they leaped forward at their maddest speed, almost lifting the carriage from the ground as they flew on.

Again and again the lash whistled through the air, and in a second the pace was terrific.

The Grand Duke, undoubtedly as brave as the bravest, grew nervous. He had to hold to his seat to keep there, for a very small boulder touched by the wheel would lift the carriage clear of the ground, and at times it seemed as if the wheels spun in the air instead of over the ground.

Rocks and trees were seen in a whirl, as you see them on the lightning express when you dash through woodland, and yet it seemed, as that lash whistled through the air, and the yell of Buffalo Bill rang louder and louder, that the horses went faster and faster as they sped on.

The ambulance leaped on—now rolling from side to side,

and then pitching as if in a sea—until it seemed as if wood and iron couldn't stand the pressure.

From time to time General Sheridan looked at his guest, who did not wish to exhibit what he certainly did feel—as who would not?—alarm when the least break of carriage or harness would be wreck and ruin to that, at least, if not to limb or life; and at last he asked him how he enjoyed that kind of riding.

"It is very fine, I have no doubt, for fast people," replied the Grand Duke, "but, for my part, I would rather ride a little slower."

His imperial highness got his speech out by jerks, for it was impossible to keep in one place while he spoke, and he gave a long sigh of relief when, at a sign from General Sheridan, Buffalo Bill drew the horses down to a trot, and let them get their wind, as they went out of the canon into the open plain.

"What distance did we make at that terrific speed?" asked the Grand Duke, when the ambulance stopped to receive the regular driver.

"Only four miles in about ten minutes," said General Sheridan. "That is a fair rate of speed. Twelve miles an hour is the rule yet on some stage routes; but that is so slow that we are throwing railroads into every part of the country. Another century will undoubtedly find them altogether too slow, and we shall travel in pneumatic tubes, with patent inhalers to keep us in breath while we go. I had a long talk with my friend, General Sickles, about this the other day, and he says that an invention has been made, and will likely soon be made public, which will more than quadruple the present speed of travel."

"Impossible!" ejaculated the Grand Duke. "Yet, after what I have seen in your land of wonders, nothing seems impossible to you Americans. I have seen bridges of iron, swung on tires, spanning your widest rivers. I have seen a city with more than a million and a half of people in it, supplied with water brought almost a hundred miles. I have seen a vast nation obedient to laws and rules made by themselves, and bowing to a man raised by themselves from themselves, who will lay down his command when his term expires with the same grace and ease exhibited in taking it up. I have seen that which makes me hesitate to believe there is any "divine right" in kingship. America is a land of lessons, and it would benefit the heart of any crowned monarch, if not his head, to visit her shores and inspect her institutions."

The earnest tone of the imperial speaker, and his grave, thoughtful look told but too plainly that he felt all which he uttered, and the noble-hearted Sheridan was more than gratified to hear him thus speak of a land which he loved so well and had served so gloriously.

Soon they came to the next relay of horses, and with fresh teams sped away toward the Platte, the trees upon its banks being already visible.

True to his word, our hero had the party in on time, and when the sun set in the west his imperial highness was seated in the luxurious Pullman car provided for his use.

Here he expressed his gratification at the termination of the first hunting trip he had ever enjoyed, and thanked Buffalo Bill for his part of the work of gratification. He also presented him with a beautiful turquoise scarf-pin, studded with diamonds, and sent another to the loved and loving wife of our hero, even more valuable.

"For," he said, "the lady who could win and keep the

heart of so brave and true a man, is worthy of all respect and honor!"

The scout, ever modest, accepted the gifts with diffidence, only saying he would keep them as long as he lived, in memory of the noble giver.

Then, shaking the imperial hand with a hearty, honest grasp, he bade him good-by, mounted his horse and rode at a gallop across the bridge to rejoin the dear ones in his home near McPherson, and to tell what a glorious jolting he gave the Grand Duke in the Long Canon.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CAPTURE OF BUFFALO BILL.

"Lou, my little angel, can you and the little ones spare me for four or five weeks?"

This was the question asked by our hero, after he had shone his presents to his wife and placed the Grand Duke's gift upon her bosom, the next day after the hunt.

"I have to spare you very often, whether I wish it or not, and suppose I must as long as you remain an army scout!" said the gentle lady. "Ah, William, you know not what hours of sadness I pass, even with these bright-eyed cherubs about me, when you are far off, exposed to constant danger!"

"This trip, my love, will not be a dangerous one. It is the one so often deferred—a visit to some esteemed friends whose acquaintance I made on the plains—the Jeromes, the Heckshers, the Bennetts, and others who with me as their guide have seen a little of frontier life."

"Ah, my brother," said Nellie, Buffalo Bill's noble-hearted sister, "to some men there are more deadly perils in the great cities of the East than there would be on the plains of the West, for the border men usually prepare themselves for enemies, while the enemy often comes upon them unawares in the haunts of civilization."

"There is truth in what you say, Nellie," responded Bill, "but I shall ever be on my guard. Ah, who comes here?" he continued, as he saw a mounted soldier approaching.

"Mr. Cody is wanted at the fort," said an orderly, riding up. "A herder reports a gang of Indians skulking among the hills four or five miles back."

"Pawnees, I reckon, from below, to hunt for antelope and black-tailed deer," said Bill, carelessly. "But I'll ride over and see what is wanted. Tell Texas Jack when he comes in where I have gone, so if I'm gone long, he can take my trail, Lou."

The scout bent down and kissed his little daughter, and then raised his baby-son up in his arms.

"Juddie, my boy, you grow like a young panther," he said, as he kissed his plump cheek. "One of these days you'll be the champion of my scouts, and then the reds will have to scatter, eh? We'll show 'em that you're a chip from the old block, eh? Take good care of yourselves, all—I'll be back soon, I reckon. These herders are such hands at getting up scares, and they know the Third is new out here. They'll keep in the saddle half the time if the post commandant listens to all that he hears."

"When will you get back, Willie dear?" asked the fond wife, as she reached his Mexican blanket and threw it over his shoulder.

"Just as soon as I can, and maybe a little sooner. Do you know how that can be? Or do you give up the conundrum? Well, I'll tell you. I'll hear what the report is up at the fort, and I may not have to go at all."

Bill now kissed both wife and sister, and heard the soft "God bless you," which each breathed, and then hurried out and mounted his horse.

"Don't forget to tell Texas Jack which way I've gone when he comes in," cried the scout, as he turned his horse toward the fort.

The wife and sister stood at the open door for some time to see whether he rode away or not, and about twenty minutes later they saw him riding up the river alone and at full speed.

"I do not like to see him go alone," said Nellie.

"He says he is safest alone," said the wife, sadly. "He has nearly lost his life several times in saving men who were with him, when with his fleet horse, alone, he could have got away without a scratch when numbers pressed him. He has told me so often that he feels safest when alone that I cannot but believe that it is so. He rides very fast. There must have been truth in the report or he would not be in such a hurry to look into it."

"There comes Texas Jack and his hunters," said Nellie. "They, too, ride in fast. Perhaps they have seen a trail."

The hunter whom she named, a rather young but most formidable looking man, who rode with the dash for which the Texas men are famous, came up to the house at a gallop, preceding about a dozen mounted men, who, armed like himself, were covered with dust from a long and rapid ride.

"Where's Cap'n Bill, ma'am?" asked the hunter first named, as he rode up to the door.

"Off up the river on a scout. They sent for him at the fort, and he is just out of sight!"

"Up the river? Did you say up the river, ma'am?"

"Yes—had you been five minutes sooner you could have seen him for yourself. There is a report of hostile looking Indians lurking about in that direction."

"He has gone on a false trail, ma'am, as sure as my name is Texas Jack. We crossed a big trail, four hours ago, tending off to the nor'west toward the Big Horn country! The game was all scattered, too, as if their hunters took a wide range."

"Then my husband will be back all the sooner. He left word that I must tell you where his trail went!"

"All right, ma'am. If he doesn't come back in a few hours we'll saddle fresh horses and go after him!"

Buffalo Bill did not come back in a few hours, nor in all the long night, the uneasy night to her who watched and prayed for his coming.

When the morning star rose, Texas Jack, alone, took the trail of his friend and employer.

When the sun was an hour high he was seen spurring his horse madly toward the fort. He came, as he went, alone.

"My husband—the father of my children!" murmured the loving wife and mother. "Oh, William—William, where are you now?"

Quickly she threw a shawl over her shoulders and hurried to the fort to learn what news Texas Jack had brought.

As she came near the parade ground, she saw a company forming for the march, officers hurrying to mount, and signs of an immediate movement of the troops.

"Where are you going? What is the news?" she asked of an orderly who was passing her.

The man was new at the post, he did not know her, or he would have been more cautious in what he said.

"The Indians have got Buffalo Bill, the scout, ma'am—Texas Jack has just brought in his hat and one of his pistols!"

Most women would have sunk fainting to the earth. But the wife of the hero was strong of heart in the dark hour, and she only said:

"God of mercy help him!"

Then she went on and learned, that though there were signs of a struggle where the hat and pistol were found, and proof that he had fallen into a well-laid ambushade, there was no sign that he had been killed, or even wounded.

Texas Jack had taken the right step, and even while Mrs. Cody was listening to the story, two gallant companies were moving off up the river, at a gallop, with Texas Jack and his hunters in the lead and on the trail.

The young ranger knew there was no time for delay, and that if Buffalo Bill's life had been spared for the time, it was more than likely only saved that he might suffer more in a savage death by and by.

So he led the column at all the speed his horse could make.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ONE TRIAL FOR FREEDOM.

"I reckon it is a humbug, colonel, but I will go and see," said Buffalo Bill, when the officer in command at Fort McPherson told him what the herder had reported. "There is too much to lose, and too little gain for Indians to fool their time around here; and, bad as old Spotted-Tail has been, treacherous as all the reds are, I've got an idea they'll keep peace with us at least through the winter. That winter campaign of General Sheridan taught them a lesson they will never forget; and they know now from observation that he commands in the West, and they fear him as the Seminoles used to fear General Harney. But I'll ride up and see if there is any sign where they've crossed the river. It may be a band of Pawnees, short of meat, who are after deer on the islands of the Platte. They winter in the brush, you know."

So saying, Cody remounted his horse, touched his hat, and, armed only with his revolvers and knife, rode off up the river, humming the ninety-ninth verse of this favorite song of his:

"I shot an Indian on a stump,
A thousand yards away—
'Twas fun to see that Indian jump,
Just like a rabbit gray!"

The scout glanced toward his home as he galloped on and breathed a blessing on the loved ones there, but soon they were out of sight, and he rode on thoughtfully, looking keenly about for Indians signs.

He had passed even farther than the point named by the herder, seeing none, when he made up his mind to go back, thinking it useless to go on when neither trail nor red man could be found.

He was about to turn his horse on the back track when he heard a horse neighing some way up the river. As several horses had lately strayed from the government herd at the fort, the scout thought he might find some, perhaps, where he heard the sound; so he rode on toward a grove of cotton-wood just ahead, at a careless gait, looking among the bushes as he neared them, for a sign of horses.

Suddenly, as he rode into a clump of willows, he was

sprung upon by at least a dozen Indians, and before he could raise his hand to clutch a weapon, was dragged from his horse, and cast, face down, upon the earth.

Instantly, in spite of his Herculean struggles, his hands were bound behind him, and while two heavy Indians bestrode his body and held him down, a thick bandage was passed over his eyes, so that when raised to his feet he could not see.

All this had been done so quickly, and without noise, that had he not had a glance at them as they sprang upon him, he would not have even known that Indians had committed the outrage.

"I've been handled by ruffians before, and not so very gently either," muttered the scout; "but they gave me light after they let me up, while these red curs seem to intend to keep me in the dark, by all appearances. Ho! you red cusses! what do you mean by this?"

"The pale-face will know soon enough. Let him be still now, or he shall eat a mouthful of dirt!" said one of the reds.

"If you'll untie my hands I'll make you eat dirt, you beggarly dog-soldier!"

"We are not dog-soldiers—we are better men!" said the Indian. "The pale-face had best save his breath, for he has a long journey to make, and he will ride fast."

"Where to? That is the question—or is it a conundrum?" said Bill, coolly.

"Pale-face will know soon enough. He will get on his horse now."

Bill felt the back of the horse which was led up for him to mount. He knew in an instant that it was not Powder Face, but as he passed his hand forward to the withers of the horse, an exclamation left his lips.

"If this isn't my Tall Bull gray, I'm a free man! It is, sure enough," he continued, as he felt one of the ears and recognized a well-remembered notch in it. "Where did you get this horse," he continued.

"None of your business! You get on, that is enough for you. Indian can be mighty rough if he gets mad—so look out!"

The scout knew that it was useless to anger his captors, but his next thought was how to delay them. His only hope of escape would be in rescue, and he knew that would soon be attempted if Texas Jack got on the trail.

A word about Texas Jack now will give the reader an idea of whether he will be of any use to build a hope on or not.

He had been reared on the vast Texas prairies, as a ranchero, or cattle herder. Almost born in the saddle—at any rate, raised in it—he was an unequalled horseman, could use the lasso with more skill than a Mexican or a Comanche, was a dead shot, untiring on the trail, and he was the "boss," or foreman of Mr. Cody's private band of paid buffalo hunters, who were kept in the field hunting or trapping nearly all the year round by that gentleman.

Buffalo Bill finding that he would not be allowed to use his eyes by his captors, determined to learn through his ears and his judgment all he could about them, their destination, and their intentions.

He soon satisfied himself that the party was small, composed only of warriors, and that they were under strict discipline.

There was no talk; he could not yet tell what tribe they belonged to; their actions were prompt and quick, for in five minutes after he was seized they were moving through the brush at a gallop.

Soon they were fording, then swimming a stream—the Platte, of course, for there was no other near by. He knew by the time they were in the water that they did not make a direct crossing, and as they went into the stream a second time he knew they had either crossed to an island and thence swam up the stream somewhat to the other shore or had crossed twice to throw pursuit off the track.

At any rate, this part of their proceedings rather puzzled him. His horse was led, so he had no chance to judge by the way the animal acted under the rein how he was going.

"This is what I call playing a lone-hand blind," said Bill, after an hour of rapid galloping over land, exposed to a biting wind, had tired his patience. "Here, you red cuss! whoever you are bossing this private party, where is my blanket? I had one when you laid your dirty claws on me."

There was no verbal answer made, but the scout felt that his own blanket had been thrown over his shoulders, and it was a decided change for the better.

He now sat silent in his seat, hoping to catch from some word dropped carelessly an idea of what was before him. But he was disappointed.

They rode on for a long time—it seemed hours to him—and again they dashed into and swam a river.

This should be the North Platte he thought, but if so, when had they crossed the railroad? Surely he would have heard the feet of the animals striking the rails.

What cunning of theirs could have prevented that? He believed it impossible, and that, therefore, they must now be recrossing the South Branch.

Yet the water seemed colder than at first, and he knew that there was a difference in the streams at that season.

"For once I'm out. This is worse than a conundrum!" muttered our hero. "If I only had my hands loose I'd soon see!"

"The pale-face will see as soon as he wants to. Maybe he'll see what he will not like to see when his eyes are open!" said the only Indian who had spoken all this time, and who used good English in his talk.

"Then it will be your face, I reckon," said Bill, with an air of levity that he did not feel. "If you chaps intend to roast me, why don't you do it here where timber is plenty? I hear the wind whistling through the branches, and I think, on the whole, I'd rather roast than freeze!"

"Freeze first, then roast good afterward. It makes meat tender," said the grim attendant.

"Comfortable, that. You're a consoling cuss. I suppose you have a squaw or two in your lodge looking for your return, haven't you?"

"Yes—me got six. Two of 'em young and handsome—keep to look at and love. Four old and ugly, but first-rate for work."

Bill had learned something. He was in the hands of a chief. None but a chief was rich enough to keep six wives.

He now wanted to know what tribe. He muttered in Sioux that the thongs were cutting into his wrists.

His captor made no reply; neither did he loosen the bonds at all.

Then Bill made the same complaint in Pawnee and Shoshonee. No attention was paid to either language.

Bill began to wonder if his eyes had been deceived, and whether he was not in the hands of white men disguised as Indians. But what could white men want with him? If it had been during the war of the rebellion he would have understood it. But that was over, and he had not, to his

knowledge, any private enemies even among the lawless men of the border.

It was, indeed, a conundrum which Bill could not solve.

His hands, kept so long behind his back, did really begin to feel excruciating pain, and he made up his mind to try English in his complaints.

"My hands are tied too tight, you red cuss!" he said, after a pause. "If you don't loosen them a little, you'll find them dropping off by and by."

"If I loosen a little, pale face will try to loosen a heap more. Then I'll have to knock him in the head and take his scalp."

"I don't believe that will hurt your conscience much," said the scout, gravely. "But if you'll slack up about an inch, I'll agree to keep quiet."

The Indian—Bill now knew it was an Indian by the smell when he bent over him—loosened the fastenings materially, and though still uncomfortable, it was a relief.

Suddenly Bill heard an ejaculation from another one of the party. It came in unmistakable Sioux, and told that the speaker saw strangers, not on their trail, but ahead of them.

The Indian who held the reins of the horse which Bill rode, and had hitherto acted as spokesman, dropped the rein and rode forward, either to consult the others or to reconnoiter.

Bill knew the horse he was on. It was a tall, raw-boned gray, from which, when with General Carr, he had shot Tall Bull, an Ogallala chief, capturing the horse. It was swift and enduring. If it would only take the back track, he might escape his captors now. They had taken the pains to fasten his ankles to the girth, and tied as he was he could make no use of his hands to lash the horse to its full speed. But he had ridden him in many a race at the fort, and the animal knew his yell. The moment that he felt that the horse was free, and that the Indian had dropped the rein, he made up his mind to make one trial for freedom.

Buffalo Bill bent forward on the horse, pressed his knees to its side and his heels in, as he would on starting for a race, and then gave one of his wild, startling yells.

It had the desired effect; for in a second the horse bounded away as if stung by an electric shock.

The rush of air, as well as the yells of the Indians in his rear, told the gallant scout that he had got a start, and his only wonder was that he did not feel or hear a few bullets from their guns.

Exultant at the thought of freedom, and hoping, helpless though he was, that the horse by instinct would take the back track, Bill yelled again and again, and he felt that the noble horse responded to his cry and dashed away, at racing speed under him.

Again he heard the yell of the Indians, but the sound came low and faint. He was fast leaving them. Oh, could he but free his hands!

Furiously he tugged to get them out of the bonds. But the harder he drew, the tighter the knots became. The Indian who had bound him knew how to do it securely. He could not rub the bandage from his face either, though he tried to do it by bowing his head to the neck of the horse.

On—he rode until at last he heard nothing but the measured leaps of his horse and its hot, panting breath.

But he still urged the animal forward by his voice, for he hoped it was carrying him back toward the fort, or

somewhere toward help.

"If I could only hear water, and get the horse to take to it, I could throw the devils off my trail!" he muttered.

"But that would do me precious little good if the horse hasn't taken a home track. For, without help, I'll freeze to death or starve on his back. This is about as bad as being cooped up in a calaboose, I reckon, though I never tried that on. Hark! what is that? I hear water as sure as my name is Buffalo Bill, or Bison William, as the Aldermen of the Union Club used to call me. Pick up, Tall Bull, and move on; don't you hear water?"

The horse heard more than water, and he stood stock-still and trembled. Bill heard the new sound. It was like the roll of distant thunder at first; then it came louder and nearer, and he knew that it was the stampede of a herd of buffalo.

To stand still and be trampled down by a thousand hoofs was not in his line, and Bill, with a wild, frenzied yell, and with the action of his feet, once more brought his tired horse into action.

It was a fearful ride now; the horse, fairly terror-stricken, seemed to fly on, and the country to roughen, too, as he sped away.

The sound of hoofs behind grew fainter, the dash of water plainly fell on his ears from the front, and then—his horse seemed to stumble or plunge from some fearful height—he went with him forward and down, until some things struck him and his senses left him entirely.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BUFFALO BILL AT HOME.

When Buffalo Bill became conscious, he felt that some one was kindly bathing his hot brow with cold water, and opening his eyes, he looked up into a face which at first seemed familiar, though it was much disguised, but which, the moment she spoke, he recognized.

For it was that of Belle Boyd, now dressed and painted as an Indian princess would dress and paint if she wished to make herself a point of admiration.

"Heavens and earth—is it you, Miss Belle?" murmured the scout.

"I believe it is, if I know myself, and I think I ought to by this time!"

"How did I get here, and where am I?"

"I think you came in on that dead horse, but he was alive when he pitched over that cliff with you. As to where you are, I can hardly say, though Red Plume can, perhaps, when he gets back with some meat."

Buffalo Bill raised his head and saw that he was in a well-sheltered camp in a deep ravine. The gray horse lay dead a few yards away, and when he looked up and saw what a fearful ledge he had come over, the brave scout wondered why he wasn't dead also.

Then he rose with the aid of the strange girl, even more beautiful than ever in her new costume and guise. Rose and cautiously moved a step or two to see if there was indeed any motive power left in him.

"I'm as stiff as a raw recruit in a leathern stock!" said Bill. "But I reckon I'll come out of it after a while. But I am here, the good Lord only knows where, dismounted and without arms. That is a pretty fix for an old plainsman."

"How did you get so far away from home, and how came you tied hand and foot and lashed to your horse, like a second Mazeppa?"

"That is a conundrum to me, and I give it up. I tumbled into an ambushade like a fool, was overpowered, tied, and blindfolded before I knew what was up. The cussed Indians that took me kept so mum that I couldn't tell what tribe they belonged to, but just as I started to get away from them I heard one speak in the Sioux tongue. So I suppose they were Sioux!"

"Most likely. I know old Spotted-Tail was bent on making you his son-in-law."

"The old cuss never will. I've got my faults, Miss Belle, but being untrue to my loved ones at home isn't one of 'em. You say Red Plume is off on a hunt?"

"Yes—but he has been gone long enough to kill a dozen buffalo and dress them!"

"He is here. He has had something to do beside hunting meat. He has had the Sioux to watch and to lead off from our trail!"

It was Red Plume himself who spoke, and his horse from which he had just leaped was white with foam, and panting for breath.

"The Sioux! Are they near?" asked Bill.

"Yes—too close. There was a big band to the north, but they have gone on. A small band with Spotted Tail himself, stays behind. I think they look for Long-Rifle!"

"They'll have a bitter dose if they get me. What arms have you got here, Miss Belle?"

"A pair of good revolvers, a Henry rifle, and a twelve-inch bowie-knife. That is my fit out. Red Plume has a gun, knife, and hatchet!"

"Not much of an arsenal," said Bill, sadly; "but if you'll lend me one of your weapons, I don't care which, there will be a half-dozen Sioux funerals after they get my hair!"

"They mustn't get your hair, William. It is too pretty to lose!"

"If they find this camp there'll be a hair auction, I reckon."

"I don't think they will. Red Plume told us that he had been leading them away from our trail!"

"He has a hard old coon to fool when Spotted-Tail is on the trail. Ah—didn't I tell you so! Look—look! Give me a revolver, quick!"

Belle handed our hero her Henry rifle instead, with its numerous charges ready, and then Buffalo Bill straightened to his full height, and in spite of his bruises felt like a man ready to wipe out half a score of reds before he would consent to go under.

It was time to do so, for Spotted-Tail himself, riding at the head of a dozen braves, came slowly but steadily up the ravine toward the party of three.

Buffalo Bill waited, his companions ready like himself to use their weapons, until the Sioux chief was within forty or fifty paces.

Then with his rifle ready for instant use, the scout shouted:

"Let Spotted-Tail halt where he is. If he comes one rifle's length nearer till I say yes, his time to die has come. Buffalo Bill will not lie. His rifle is ready!"

The Sioux chief halted. Then he dismounted from the horse, thrust his spear in the ground, and laid his other weapons beside it.

"Now, can Spotted-Tail come in and hold a talk with Long-Rifle?" he asked.

"Yes—if he comes alone. But if one of his warriors moves to join him, Spotted-Tail will die!"

"Good! The chief asks no more!"

And haughty as ever, the proud old chief came forward.

When within a yard of Buffalo Bill he halted and extended his hand.

The scout shook his head and kept back his own hand.

"Spotted-Tail has broken faith with me," he said. "He said he would keep peace with me and the rest of the pale-faces. He has spoken with a forked tongue. He had an ambuscade laid for me. I was trapped and taken, tied up like a bad dog, and here I am, far from my lodge. But for these friends, I might have died!"

Spotted Tail looked down. Buffalo Bill had spoken so plainly, charged him so openly with the late outrage, that knowing its truth, he could not deny the charge. The scout saw his confusion, and went on.

"What has the chief of the Sioux nation to say? Is he not a liar in the face of the Great Spirit?"

The scout waited for an answer. It came at last, not bold and defiant, but in a low tone, just audible.

"Spotted-Tail has lied. He loved his daughter more than he did his own honor. But Long-Rifle was not hurt. Not a drop of his blood was shed. When he said the thongs hurt his arms, Spotted-Tail loosened them. Had Long-Rifle been still and staid with his guard, his head would now rest on the bosom of Dove Eye. His horse would be alive and strong, and not dead as it is now!"

"So. You thought you'd keep me a prisoner and make me take Dove-Eye, whether I wanted to or not?"

"Yes, that was all Spotted-Tail meant to do. He would not hurt the white chief. Dove-Eye loves him, and she will die if she is not his!"

"The soldiers are already here!" said Red Plume, for his quick ear had caught the sound of a bugle call not far away.

"Yes—they have followed on my trail with Texas Jack for their guide!" cried Buffalo Bill, joyfully. "I knew he would find my trail, if mortal man could do it."

Spotted-Tail, who had given a slight start when he had heard the bugle, now stood calm and unmoved.

"Let the white warriors come!" he said. "Let them shoot me down and take my scalp. Dove-Eye will droop and die, and why should I live. I am a child now. My eyes drop rain, and my heart trembles. I am no longer fit to be the chief of a nation of braves! Let the white warriors come. I will not turn my back to save my life!"

"Spotted-Tail is in no danger!" said Buffalo Bill, kindly. "Long-Rifle will tell the white soldiers that the Sioux chief is his friend. We will not allow a gun to be fired, or a saber drawn!"

"Look!" said Red Plume.

And he pointed to a sight above them which made the heart of our hero stronger than ever.

Texas Jack with seven of his best hunters stood on the ledge above, rifles ready for use, looking down on the group below.

"How is it, boss? Any shootin' or hangin' wanted done down there?"

"No, Jack; no. All is friendly here just now, and likely to be. Have you troops along?"

"Yes; two companies. Shall I have them sent around to rope in them reds?"

"No; ask the commanding officer to keep them back. But come yourself with a spare horse for me."

"All right, boss; I'll be there in about forty breaths. I found Powder Face on your trail."

"You see now, Spotted-Tail, how foolish it would have been to carry me off with your people. The white braves would have followed till they found me, and, had they not found me, there would have been trouble in your camp. I have true friends where the boys wear blue!"

"And one that used to wear gray," said Belle Boyd, earnestly. "For you're a true man, Bill Cody, and I like you, not as a woman generally likes men, but as she likes a hero when she sees him or reads about him. I suppose we're about to part, for I've made up my mind to reign over red men if I can, for I'm sick of poor white trash, such as I have met in the States. I heard you say you were going East soon, before I left your camp on the Platte?"

"Yes; I have a furlough now from General Sheridan to go and visit relatives whom I have never seen, and friends who are very dear to me."

"Well, all I can say is good luck go with you, now and forever. When you get East you may hear some talk about Belle Boyd. As long as they say I was a bold rebel and a fearless, dashing girl, all right. But if you hear one thing in the shape of a man say a word darkening the purity of my private fame, knock him down for me, and kick him after he is down!"

"I'll do it, Belle, to pay you for your kindness to me. But don't you think you'd better go back to the settlements? You'll lead a rough life among the reds, I'm afraid!"

"Well, I am prepared for it, and the novelty will please me. Ah, here comes that friend of yours—Texas Jack."

"He is a friend, Belle—true as steel. The best rider and hunter on the plains, myself not excepted."

"That will do for you to say, boss. Here is your horse," said the hunter, as he led Powder Face up to his old master.

"Thank you, Jack. When I'm on that insect I feel at home. Now, Spotted-Tail, I'll shake hands with you, and say good-by. If you'll keep your faith with us pale-faces, you and I will meet often, and I'll never cross your path without having a present for you and another for Dove-Eye."

The Sioux chief, very gloomy in look, took the extended hand of Cody.

"Long-Rifle," he answered, "goes back to his wife, his little ones happy. Spotted-Tail goes to his tribe to see Dove-Eye pine away and die. But if it is the will of the Great Spirit, it is good, and the chief will not complain. Good-by."

He turned, strode back to the spot where his arms lay, resumed them, mounted, and rode away.

Buffalo Bill now returned the rifle to Belle, shook her warmly by the hand, bade her farewell, and then on Powder Face rode out of the ravine with Texas Jack, and soon joined the cavalry which had been sent out in search of him.

They were soon on the march for Fort McPherson where his loved ones waited in an agony of suspense news of him.

It was joy, indeed, in that home when Bill came himself to tell them of that last strange adventure, and to assure them of his safety.

And now I may as well close and write that word which is the most pleasant to me just now of all—

[THE END.]